

Today we continue our series on seeking to become better followers of God. This is a 7 part series in which we are focusing on worship, study, fellowship, serving others, healthy living, and rest. Today we are focusing in on the spiritual practice of prayer. It is our hope that by focusing in on these 7 practices that we will learn how to hear what God is directing us to become in our lives and in our church.

You have the same insert in the bulletin that was in the bulletin last week. You are invited to look over this list and to begin to set goals for yourself in each of these 7 areas.

(Reflect on possible goals in each of these areas as I share insert)

Today we are going to spend our time focused on prayer.

In her book entitled "Sailboat Church," author Joan Gray contrasts sailboat churches and rowboat churches. In the early church boats became symbols for the church. That is why many church sanctuaries look like the inside of a boat.

In the time of Jesus, there were two ways to power a boat. One way was to be a rowboat. In a rowboat you harness the power from the muscles of the people in the boat. In a rowboat the power is dependent on the ones in the boat. The people in the boat had to work very hard in order to move the boat in the direction that they wanted to go.

(imitate being a row boat)

So one kind of boat is a rowboat.

The other kind of boat in the time of Jesus was a sailboat. In a sailboat, the power comes from the wind. The sailor's responsibility is to hoist up the sails in order to catch the wind. The wind provides the power to take the boat to the places that the wind wants the boat to go.

(imitate being a sail boat)

So one kind of boat is a sail boat that is guided by the wind.

Gray then compares rowboats and sailboats to churches of today. Rowboat churches, she says, are churches who believe that "God has given us the basic agenda of what it means to be the church and that our responsibility is to get on with it. The dominant attitude in rowboat churches is that either "we can do this" or "we can't do this."

The church is focused on its own circumstances like how much money it has in the bank. How many volunteers it has available. How charismatic are its leaders. The population around the church. The rowboat congregation believes and acts as if its progress depends on its own strength, wisdom, and resources. In rowboat churches it's all about how hard, long, and well people are willing to row.

The basic assumption, according to Gray, in rowboat churches is the assumption that we human beings have the ability to do what will make the ultimate difference. In rowboat churches we are the ones in charge.

According to Gray, in sailboat churches the reality of life in the church is that God can do abundantly far more than we could ever ask or imagine. Sailboat churches tend to focus not on their own situation like how much money they have in the bank or how many volunteers they have. According to Gray, sailboat churches are instead focused on discerning God's unfolding will.

In rowboat churches the people seek to be in charge. They work harder and harder in an attempt to fix whatever problems they may feel that they have.

In sailboat churches, however, power is focused on God. In sailboat churches God becomes the chief guide and power source. In sailboat churches the sails are put up with the belief that God will provide the wind and direction.

I have to admit that I am a recovering row boat captain. I was consumed with the belief that as a pastor it was my responsibility to direct this ship. It was my responsibility to row harder and harder. To come up with the better plan, the better structure, the better vision. As a rowboat captain, I felt that the "success" of the church depended on me.

I was also that way in my private life as well. It was all about me in my relationship to God.

But then I began to realize something. Whenever I put myself in charge I would work really hard as a rowboat captain but I found myself getting more and more frustrated and more and more ineffective. And so I made a decision to depend less on myself as a leader and seek to, instead, seek to be a better follower. A better follower of God.

And let me tell you, it has been so much fun. It's like every day I get to experience another unexpected revelation from some really weird places and people. It's like every day I see how God is using me and the people around me to carry out a purpose that is so much bigger than me. Life becomes an adventure to discover.

I honestly am pretty clueless to what God is doing. But I am OK with that. I am OK with that because even though I can't see the direction most of the time I am seeking to completely trust the captain of the ship. I am seeking to hoist my sails by trusting in God rather than trusting my own capabilities. And the more I do this the more reassured I become that God is in charge.

We don't have to row harder. We simply have to put up the sails and trust in God to blow us in the direction that God seeks for us to go as a church and in your own lives.

With that in mind, I am going to invite us to lift some sails this morning. I have handed out some pieces of paper and have asked people to read the Scripture and the devotional that goes along with it. What we are going to do is that after the person reads this verse and shares this particular devotional, we are going to have some quiet time of reflection.

We are not going to talk. We are going to listen. Presbyterian worship tends to have a lot of talking. Today we are going to focus on listening. Sitting in a quiet building will drive some of you nuts.

If you need to get up and walk around and stand in the back that is fine. But we are going to allow the Scriptures and these words of reflection to guide us in becoming more of a sailboat and less of a rowboat.

(Different people will read from the 40 Days of Prayer found in the back of the Gray book).

AMEN.

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-Gray, Joan, *Sailboat Church: Helping Your Church Rethink Its Mission and Practice*, WJKP, Louisville, 2014

-Scriptures: Malachi 3:1-4 and Romans 8:18-28

-Given: September 21, 2014 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)