



DEPENDING ON GOD



Reconciled
World

Framework for Transformation
Book 1

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Introduction: Seven Core Principles

This is just one of seven core principles in this Framework for Transformation. All seven work together and reinforce one another as we seek to see God bring transformation to the brokenness in our world. The principles are:

- **Depending on God** - It's God who transforms. We need to look to Him for wisdom, provision, and supernatural intervention.
- **Nurturing Truth and Confronting Lies** - To see transformation in physical poverty and injustice, we must confront the wrong beliefs that undergird them.
- **Integrating Physical and Spiritual** - The biblical teaching that all of life is meant to be lived for God's glory changes how we understand poverty and the way we seek to address it.
- **Partnering with the Church** - The local church, Christ's bride, is key to addressing brokenness.
- **Focusing on the Vulnerable** - To see lives transformed, we must help vulnerable people to reclaim their identity as image-bearers of their Creator and stewards of the earth.
- **Mobilizing Local Resources** - As people stuck in poverty discover and use their God-given resources for God's glory, their thinking is transformed.
- **Pursuing God's Ways** - We need to be intentional and faithful to choose God's ways, which are higher than our own.

You can download PDFs of the other booklets (or request hard copies) and access additional articles, stories, and blogs about these seven core principles at frameworkfortransformation.org

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DEPENDING ON GOD

"It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your face, for You loved them." - Psalm 44:3

As I travel around the world consulting with various organizations, there seems to be a general agreement that real transformation—from brokenness to God's intentions—only happens through God's power. We all largely agree that—with the issues that we face, the depth of the problems, and the complexity of the challenges—without divine intervention, we may see good results, but not sustainable transformation that impacts every part of life.

And yet, as quickly as we all agree that we need God, an audit on our time, money and activities would imply that we

actually believe it's programs that transform. Pretty much 90+ percent of all that happens in development is raising funds for programs, hiring people to do programs, traveling abroad to do programs, and implementing programs. So what does it mean that it's God who transforms, and how should that impact our work?

Learning to depend on God

For some, depending on God comes easily. Others too often find themselves relying on great programs, best practices, or their own wisdom. And yet the Bible assures us that our source of success is actually found in leaning on God and abiding in Him.

'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.' - Proverbs 3:5-6

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing." - John 15:5

As we have sought to learn to depend on God, we have seen God do the most remarkable things, and the results have been beyond what we could have ever anticipated if we had followed best practices. In one of our programs, Truth Centered

Transformation, we've seen hundreds of communities move out of poverty.¹

At first, as communities declared themselves no longer poor, I couldn't work out how it was happening. We did challenge churches to do what we call Acts of Love—tiny projects to help their communities. But these people were poor—they foraged for food three months of the year. In my mind it seemed inevitable that they would run out of their own resources and need our intervention. But that's not what happened. In reality, they moved from tiny projects, like visiting a sick person, to bigger and bigger projects, like building roads and bridges. All without any help from us.

Whenever I asked how they had the resources they would tell me, "Our land grows more now." I'd smile and assume they must be working harder (even when they protested that they weren't), so naturally they had more. God finally got my attention one year when we had a massive drought. Throughout the nation, the crops died.

However, in the areas where we were working—where the churches met to pray and fast—their land grew three times the normal amount.

Three times. When everyone else's crops died.

“Putting God in the center of our work can feel messy and uncomfortable.”

For years we had put this verse on all of our materials: "If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves

¹ You can read the whole story at tctprogram.org/foundersstory

and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14). And yet it wasn’t until the year of the drought that I was really challenged as to what I believed. When the verse said, “heal your land,” what did I think it meant?

Putting God in the center of our work can feel messy and uncomfortable. It upsets my western worldview. I like things to be organized and for God to fit into explainable boxes. However, 20 years of walking with people experiencing poverty has taught me that God can and will do far more than I could ever imagine. His heart is for the vulnerable, and He is able to bring transformation.

So what does it look like to depend on God? For me, it certainly didn’t look like unwavering faith from the beginning. Depending on God requires conscious obedience in the face of fears and doubts. Here are the things that we’ve practiced ourselves and believe are essential:

1. Make sure prayer remains at the top of your to-do list.

As work becomes more demanding, more often than not it is time with God that ends up getting neglected. On the busiest of days, we tend to squeeze God into the cracks—a quick Bible reading in the taxi, a prayer while we brush our teeth. Recognizing that God is the source of our success causes us to re-prioritize things. It helps us to understand that there really isn’t anything more important than investing in our relationship with God through time spent listening and praying.

Recently I was planning a visit to one of our programs that needed a significant shift. We wanted to see the denominations involved take ownership of both coordinating and funding the program in their own churches, rather than looking to us to do that. It was going to take a number of significant changes, from the Program Director giving up a lot of power and prestige through to denominations being willing to pay all the costs themselves. I talked to many people who had experience working with the churches in this country, and they all assured me that what we were hoping to accomplish was impossible. They said the churches were too poor, too used to outside funding. The last 12 months of programing had taught me that they probably weren't wrong. The Program Director seemed baffled by the idea and very reluctant to give up his "leadership". But we still felt this was the direction that God was leading us.

The temptation before going was to try to write a training that would get the leadership team onboard with the importance of moving ownership to the denominations. Instead, we called our prayer teams to pray. We got on our knees, and we fasted. We begged God for a miracle.

“*there really isn't anything more important than investing in our relationship with God*”

When I arrived, the Program Director started our first meeting by sharing that he wanted to make significant changes to the program—all those that we were hoping to make. In fact, he had already started by getting agreements with a number of

denominations. I was stunned. By the end of the week, over 20 denominations signed up to do the program using their own resources!

No training I could have brought would have produced the results that God gave us through prayer. And this is not an isolated incident. Foundation donors who told us that the application process was long and involved have accepted our first rough draft. Emails arrive solving problems that I couldn't see a way around. Ideas for trainings or presentations suddenly come together.

As the leader of a busy organization, there is enormous temptation to bow to the overflowing to-do list. And yet, there remains this tug in my spirit, reminding me that, almost without fail, things happen much more smoothly when saturated in prayer rather than my clever ideas.

2. Build a prayer network

The Bible tells us that we do not battle against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers (Ephesians 6:12). Since that sounds somewhere between melodramatic and alarming, we tend to ignore that verse, putting it in the 'too hard' box. We throw out a few cursory prayers and hope the charismatic groups we partner with have it covered. (Well at least I do. I really don't like thinking about spiritual warfare.)

But the battle is real, and we need to pay attention. If you want to see transformation, not just a few changes, you can expect opposition. If you look to confront lies that have held people in bondage for generations, you can expect

opposition. And if you go to places in Africa and Asia where witchcraft is commonly practiced, don't expect it to fall away without a fight.

In 2016, our organization faced an extraordinary number of small problems—things like a stolen computer and phone, lost bags, illness, car accidents. Normal troubles, except they were happening at an extraordinary rate. As we prayed about the possibility of more expansion, God graciously pointed out that our prayer strategy just hadn't kept up with our current growth. We were growing like a weed, but we hadn't really strengthened our prayer network through that time. So I started to mobilize prayer.

Since then, we have been creating materials that help to mobilize prayer not only for ourselves but for the issues that we address—things like genocide, abuse of the differently-abled, and rural poverty.² We've also moved our fundraiser to being a prayer-raiser (notably not even a word).

Not coincidentally, those problems that seemed to plague us have dropped back to normal levels again. Furthermore, things have started to come together so much more smoothly. As shared above, problems that feel intractable are often suddenly resolved without our involvement. We are still on the journey and have far to go in raising up prayer. In fact we're still trying to work out how to go about

² You can see copies of what we have at reconciledworld.org/pray. If you would like copies of materials without our logo then just let us know—we love to share what we have.

it. But we do recognize that it's essential and we don't want to grow any more until we have made more strides in this area.

3. Fast

When we first started the TCT program, we were desperate. For one thing, I was young, white, and female. In the churches I was trying to engage with, those weren't exactly admired qualities. In fact, one denomination leader who was interested in the training asked if I could find an older male Asian to do the teaching. Then, when we finally got some churches lined up, the translator/coordinator found out that she had cancer the day before we started training. She asked for the year off, and our team of two became a team of one.

In my desperation, I fasted for 40 days and then 3 weeks a year and the first three days of each month. Today, when people ask why we were so successful, I point back to those times of fasting. I honestly believe they, more than anything else, were the key.

Let's be honest, none of us love fasting. It's easy to ignore or diminish the importance of it. However, I truly believe it's critical. There have been times when things have seemed to be going more smoothly, and we've lost that sense of desperation. Fasting felt

“
Today, when people ask why we were so successful, I point back to those times of fasting”

less essential. And yet, when we've neglected the discipline of fasting, all the remarkable breakthroughs, insights and coincidences seem to fade away. While I don't truly understand how it all works, I can't deny that there seems to be a strong connection between our obedience in fasting and God's intervention.

4. Be careful about depending on programs

I've lived in the same country for the last twenty years. In that time, I have seen the Church amongst the majority people go backwards in both numbers and passion for God. One leader candidly told me, "Before we prayed and fasted for three days each month because we thought that's how you grew a church. Now we just follow the church growth models."

Like these churches, when we hear of a great program, we easily think of it as The Answer. However, we need to take time to pause and pray, Is this really the solution that You have for this need? Maybe He has a better plan that we couldn't have ever anticipated.

In one of the areas where we worked, there were 30 villages with a significant water problem. When I heard that people had to walk one to three miles to get water, I felt helpless. We had a tiny budget, no expertise and no idea how to help. I would have created water systems if I could have worked out how to do it, but all we had was a Bible study on loving our neighbors.

I certainly didn't think that was a solution to the water problem. It was just all I had to offer. The local trainers

looked equally perplexed when I assured them that this was a good first step. I told them, “We start by obeying God with what we have and pray God will bring a solution.” The words rang a little hollow, even to me. The best I thought I could hope for was that God might provide a contact with an organization who could dig the wells.

“ *Maybe He has a better plan that we couldn't have ever anticipated.*”

The trainers went out to the churches and taught them that they needed to show God's love to their communities through simple Acts of Love. The trainers didn't tell them what to do, only that they ought to ask God for ideas. One church prayed and felt that God told them to dig a well. So 15 people gathered and took 15-minute turns digging by hand.

After a couple of days of that, they had a well. When the rest of the churches in the area heard about it, they too started to dig wells for their communities. The churches shared the newly found access to water with their amazed neighbors, testifying that the wells were built to show God's love to the community.

God intervened in the process with amazing miracles. The government had tried to dig wells in this area in the past, but failed to hit water. Yet the churches hand-dug 200 wells, and 200 times found water. Another problem in the area was that the groundwater was tainted with arsenic. But the government tested the churches' wells multiple times—no arsenic. God healed their water.

Fifteen years later, these wells continue to serve the communities. In many cases they have been upgraded as well as maintained. God's solution was not only effective, it was also sustainable. Beyond receiving access to the water they needed, people also started to realize they could make a difference in their community. They now believed they could address other problems too. Best of all, as the people in each of the communities saw God's miracles and the love of His church, hundreds made a commitment to Christ.

Isaiah 55 reminds us that "God's ways are not our ways." We need to be careful. Even when something is obviously the best solution, we must pray with open hearts and minds. Is it truly the answer that God intends? The water solution that God had was better by far than my own—people came to Christ, each village could have as many wells as they wanted (rather than the number I could afford), God received glory, and community members were inspired to take on other challenges. It started a movement. It gave them dignity.

We need to challenge others to depend on God.

In reality most of us know the importance of depending on God. While our experiences may vary, we agree that more prayer wouldn't be a bad thing. However, there is another important part of the principle of depending on God that we more often miss—challenging others to depend on God.

There is a common saying that people use when they are thinking about helping the poor: “If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; if you teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.” It’s a great proverb to express that we don’t want to leave people dependent on us. We recognize that, if we give someone a meal today, they will still need a meal tomorrow, because we haven’t really solved the problem. Unless it’s an emergency relief situation, we aren’t really helping; if anything we are making people weaker. Instead of learning to address their own problems, we are teaching them to look to us for answers. It’s a good saying, and one we can all learn from.

However, this idea has a major flaw: we are designed to be dependent. Independence is not a strong biblical idea. Rather, the Bible tends to use words like ‘unity’ and ‘body’. As I write this, I struggle to think of a single verse that encourages greater independence. It’s not how God made us. Teaching people to be independent goes against our very design. Teaching people to be dependent on us is equally unhelpful. Instead, we need to teach people to depend on God and to live in godly community.

Here are three disciplines we practice to keep from hindering others’ dependence on God:

1. Don’t answer questions

It’s just that simple. When people come to you with questions, looking for wisdom about how to solve a problem, *don’t give them an answer*. Instead, ask them if they have prayed about it and what they believe God is saying.

It’s about the hardest thing to do. For one thing, in most cultures, as the leader or the outsider, we are expected to

have answers. And often we do feel like we know the answer. If we don't give an answer we disappoint those who are asking. There seems no logical reason to hold back. However, if we always provide answers, we stop people from learning to depend on God. Those we work with end up becoming dependent on us. Next time they face a challenge they will be back looking for answers from us. Yet God's answers are a whole lot better (and often completely different) than anything we would have thought of.

“ *we need to teach people to depend on God and to live in godly community*”

I remember a pastor sharing that everyone in his village grew poppies and was addicted to opium. As he studied about building God's Kingdom, he realized that opium addiction wasn't good. So he called a village meeting and told everyone to stop. The next day they went out and cut down all their crops, and no one used opium again. We verified the story by asking others in the community, and they all shared the same thing. In no program would we ever suggest that you should call a town meeting and expect everyone to be released from addiction. However, this pastor did just that in obedience to God, and God responded with a miracle.

In yet another area they needed bridges. Fortunately they didn't call me, because I would have explained that bridges, especially 300-400 foot-long suspension bridges, are massively complicated and require an engineer. No one in their

area had completed elementary school. But they prayed. And God showed them how to build a bridge. The design was so good, in fact, that the government now uses it as the model for all bridges in that province.

The best part is, in every case, by looking to God and receiving answers from Him, people's relationships with God were strengthened. They had experienced His love, provision, and power in a new way. What if, by answering their questions, I had robbed them of this intimacy with their Father?

2. Pray for wisdom - for them as well as for yourself

Praying for wisdom for myself has never been too much of a struggle. I am always abundantly aware of how little I know. However, I have recently been challenged on how rarely I pray that those I advise will have wisdom. Do I even want God to answer that prayer? After all, it's nice to feel like I have something to contribute, and a little unnerving to discover that they already have the wisdom they need before I arrive. And yet should we not be like Paul who, in Ephesians 1:17, prayed that the churches would have wisdom? Make sure you take at least as much time praying for wisdom for those you work with as you spend praying for wisdom for yourself.

3. Be wary about providing resources

Inevitably, whenever we start working with churches, there are some that send proposals seeking money for programs. Often what they want to do is good, and, in reality, it wouldn't be that hard to raise the few dollars they need. However, we never provide resources. We have seen first hand that outside resources can actually weaken the

church and, far too often, cause fighting and division. As shared in the stories above, when we challenge people to look to God, they see Him multiply in remarkable ways. Even if there isn't a miraculous provision, but the community learns to work together to find a new creative solution, they are left stronger.

Years ago, one of our partner churches believed God had called them to build houses for all those who were in unsafe housing. They did a community survey and decided they

“ *By looking to God for answers, vulnerable people experience His love, provision, and power in a new way.* ”

needed to build 34 houses. They collected resources, raised funds, volunteered their labor, and were able to complete 17 houses. The church members had already sacrificially given all they could—they were truly out of resources. However, they still believed they should finish the last 17 houses. They

met together and prayed and fasted all night. The next morning, huge trucks drove into town and dumped building materials outside of the church. Those in the church rushed out to explain that they hadn't ordered these materials and couldn't pay for them. The truck drivers responded that the government was clearing a warehouse and, as the drivers didn't want to go any further, they were dumping the materials right there—this stuff was now the church's problem. Needless to say, the church finished the houses.

But the story doesn't end there. The government was amazed to discover that the church efficiently used the building materials and ensured that houses were provided for the neediest. As a result, the local government (the same government known to actively persecute Christians) went to other villages in the district where they had seen the church serving their communities and asked if they would be willing to accept supplies to build houses as well. The churches quickly agreed. Rather than just building houses for the pastor and elders (as would have been normal), they went to the neediest and served them, even when they were not part of the church. As a result, the churches grew significantly as their neighbors started to see the church as caring for their community. The government moved from seeing the churches as a dangerous foreign religion to considering them a partner in serving the community.

Had the church contacted us and asked for materials, we may have been able to find the resources to build 17 houses. However, we certainly didn't have access to the resources needed to build the hundreds of houses that actually resulted. Nor would we have seen the same results in so many communities or the healing of the relationship with the government.

This does not mean we do not need to be generous. If anything I hope you grow in generosity each year. However, we need to be wise about how we give and what we give to. As we will discuss in the

“we need to find ways to give that empower others to use what they have”

booklet on Mobilizing Local Resources, we need to find ways to give that empower others to use what they have, pushing those we partner with to know the joy of giving, rather than just providing everything ourselves.

4. Make space in your programs

As we design programs, it's easy to make them so clear and full of next steps that we don't leave space for people in our programs to listen to God and walk in obedience to Him. In our Truth Centered Transformation program, we challenge churches to do something to show God's love to their community. We don't tell them what. We leave them to pray and decide. In reality, things would be much cleaner if all the churches follow a set pattern of Acts of Love—moving from a gift for a widow to repairing a house for orphans to building a well or cleaning the water system. Those with years of experience in development believe they can easily see what will be the most impactful projects. In fact, some denominations or organizations are tempted to do research to determine what the most important needs are and then direct the churches towards those. And yet we strongly discourage this. Instead we challenge the facilitators and denominations to allow the churches to listen to God.

All the stories in this booklet—people with third-grade education designing bridges, starting a village-wide house building project with half the necessary supplies, hand-digging wells where government efforts had failed—they all have a common thread. In practical terms, they make no sense. And yet, God used their efforts powerfully.

As we design programs, we need to ask ourselves: Is there space for the churches or Christians we work with to listen to God and follow what they believe He is telling them? Or do our programs already have all the answers? If we work in community groups, how can we encourage them (or the Christians in them) to be listening to God rather than just brainstorming together on what the community might need?

One of the many things I have learned is how incredibly faithful God is to His people when they honestly try to seek Him. However, for many of us, especially those of us in development work, learning to embrace not being in control is hard. Pointing people to God will get messy. Yet, in terms of seeing God bring transformation, the results are more than worth it.

“ *Is there space in our programs for those we work with to listen to God and follow what He tells them?* ”

Conclusion

Depending on God is neither comfortable nor easy. Yet if we agree that it's only through God that we see transformation, then more than ever we need to focus on learning to depend on Him.

I encourage you to take time to think and pray through the provided Reflect and Apply questions. Journal about them. Discuss them with your team. Search the word of God. As the Lord shows you, take specific action toward greater dependence on God.

REFLECT AND APPLY

In what ways have you practiced depending on God in the past? What about now—have you become more or less dependent on Him?

Have you ever chosen God's ways when it didn't seem to make sense? What happened?

How would you complete this sentence? I depend on God, but...
Lay it before the Lord.

Reflecting on the past month, make a list of the things that have crowded out spending time with God. Pray through the list. Give these things over to God, and ask Him to help you guard your time with Him.

When have you experienced spiritual opposition in your work with the vulnerable? What form did it take? Did God break through? How?

List the people in your prayer network. Ask the Lord to show you how to make the most of this prayer support. Are you connecting often enough? Asking for specific prayer? Are there others you ought to invite to pray?

How would you complete this sentence? I should pray and fast, but...

Lay it before the Lord.

What experiences come to mind when you hear the words “dependence” and “independence”? How do these align or conflict with what the Bible says about dependence?

Do the people you serve in your ministry look to God first to supply all their needs? Why or why not? What specific action could you take to point them toward God as their provider?

In what ways do you “leave space for God” in your program model(s)? Ask the Lord if anything needs to change.



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