

Praying Your Friends to Christ

Session 1

Biblical Prayer and Evangelism

As missionary John Hyde bowed on his knees in prayer, tears streamed down his face and dry choking sobs could be heard from his chamber. This was the daily routine for this man of prayer. People often described him as a “Christ intoxicated witness.” John Hyde was convinced that prayer was “essential” if he was to win souls to Christ. So much so that he would often spend all night praying before he would travel into the villages to share Jesus with the people there. The results were staggering. In the last three years of missionary service to India, John Hyde was personally responsible for leading at least 2500 souls to Christ through personal soul winning efforts.

John Hyde practiced biblical prayer for lost people. The Bible mandates that prayer is foundational to our lives as believers (see **John 15:1-16**). Therefore, it is essential in our witnessing life. There are four obvious ways the Bible links prayer with evangelism:

-Prayer for Personal Spiritual Needs-

A passion to pray and evangelize flows from our individual relationship with Jesus. This happens as believers recognize their utter dependence on God through prayer. Jesus certainly models His dependence on the Father in **John 17:1-8 and Luke 22: 39-45**. Jesus prays for His Father to complete His redemptive work through Him. Truly apart from Christ, a believer is not able to join God’s redemptive activity.

In **Psalms 51:10-13** David recognizes the link between prayer, personal holiness and a fruitful ministry. After his request for cleansing and renewal in verses

10-12 David continues his prayer with the statement, "Then I will teach transgressors Thy ways, And sinners will be converted to Thee" (vs. 13, NASB). This statement demonstrates the important role prayer for personal spiritual needs (in this case personal forgiveness) plays in effective evangelistic ministry. A forgiven heart produces an empowered and confident witness.

-Prayer for Unbelievers-

Jesus prayed for the lost in **John 17:20**. Effective evangelism includes heartfelt prayer for the unsaved. "Through intercessory prayer for the lost, believers can become instruments of salvation to men and women all over the world, even to those they have never seen in this life."

Prayer on behalf of the lost is clearly mandated by Christ in **Matthew 6:9-10**. In this text Jesus commands believers to pray for Christ's rule and reign (i.e., Thy Kingdom Come) to come in people's lives. The Apostle Paul models and exhorts believers concerning prayer for the lost (e.g., see **Rom. 10:1-2; I Tim. 2:1-4**).

Romans 10:1-2 shows Paul's heartfelt passion to see his fellow Israelites come to Christ when he says, "My heart's desire and prayer to God is that they might be saved." His passionate praying preceded his intentional witness (see verse 2).

In **1 Timothy 2:1-4** Paul exhorts believers to pray for all men to be saved. His words to young Timothy sound forth the priority of prayer on behalf of the lost when he says "First of all." His words also demonstrate the importance of such prayer to the fulfillment of the Great Commission in any nation (see verse 2-4).

Psalms 126:4-6 teaches passionate prayer for the lost. Charles Spurgeon correctly reminds us of the need for compassionate prayer and intentional

witness: “Weep Believer. . . Go to your God and tell Him that if souls are not saved it is not because He has no power to save but because you have never traveled for perishing sinners. Wake up, wake up, and be astonished: you have neglected prayer. Wrestle and strive with your God, and the blessing shall come—the early and latter rain of His mercy, and the earth shall bring forth plenteously, and all the nations shall call Him blessed. Look up, then, and weep.”

When the altars of churches are wet with the tears of the saints, then and only then will the darkness throughout the land begin to be stamped out. “It is not enough to share the good news: we must also pray that people might open their hearts to the gospel. It is not enough to preach to souls: we must win souls for the kingdom through intercessory Prayer. St. Mary of Jesus, a Carmelite nun, has rightly said, ‘It is the prayer of agony which saves the world’.”

-Prayer for People Involved in Evangelism Events and Activities-

In **Acts 13: 1-4** the early church prayed for and sent Barnabas and Paul on their mission to the Gentiles. The church recognized their dependence upon the power of God to fulfill their mission. In boldness and vigor Paul and Barnabas went forth. This was largely due to the church's desire to trust God in prayer.

In **2 Thessalonians 3:1** Paul requests prayer for his evangelistic team: “Finally brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified just as it did also with you” (NASB). One reason Paul’s ministry was so fruitful was because of the prayer support he often asked for and received from believers (see **Eph. 6:18-20; 1 Thess. 5:25; Col.4:12-13**). E. M. Bounds said it well, “The gospel moves with a slow and timid pace when the saints are not at their prayers early and late and long.”

-Prayer for Believers-

Much of the praying that was done in the New Testament was on behalf of believers. Jesus certainly modeled this pattern with His “Mission-Centered” prayer in **John 17**. In this prayer Jesus prays specifically for his disciples to be: kept in his name and character (vs. 11); protected from the evil one (vs. 15); sanctified in the truth of God and His Word (vs. 17); one in mission and focus (vs. 21); join Christ in His work that they may behold His glory (vs. 24).

In **Matthew 9:35-38** Jesus also taught believers how others are motivated to win the lost to Christ. In these verses Jesus shows that the problem is not with the lost multitudes who need Jesus, but the need is for more people to be actively involved in sharing their faith. Then He shares that the solution to the laborer problem is specific prayer—“beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest (**Matthew 9:38**). “More believers on their knees praying will result in more Christians on their feet evangelizing.”

Paul likewise models and teaches prayer for believers throughout his epistles. He prayed for them to have wisdom, to understand their calling to be witnesses, to be empowered and strengthened, and to grow in their love for one another and all people (see **Eph. 1: 15-19; 3:14-19; 1 Thess. 3:11-13**). Thus, he knew that if new Christians were going to grow and become fruitful witnesses for Jesus, they would need specific prayer.

Prayer for believers that focuses on the Great Commission was also central to the life and practice of the first century church (see **Acts 1:14; 6; 4:29-31; 12:5ff**). In **Acts 4: 23-31** the early church offers specific prayer for boldness to preach Christ even while being persecuted. Verse 31 records the answer to their heartfelt and unified prayers for boldness, “[They] began to speak the word of God with boldness (i.e., Divinely empowered and inspired speech). They prayed, God answered, and the Gospel continued to spread through the bold proclamation of Christ.

-Discussion Questions-

1. What changes, if any, are needed in our lives that would cause others to describe us as "Christ intoxicated witnesses?"
2. The Bible points to four key components that make up evangelistic prayer. What are those components? Which components are most needed in your personal prayer life? Congregations?
3. What does Jesus mean when he teaches his followers to pray for the kingdom to come in **Matthew 6:10**?
4. In 1 Timothy 2:1-4 Paul exhorts Timothy to make evangelistic prayer the "first priority" in his ministry. Why is this so? Does your church make evangelistic prayer the number one priority?
5. What impact on Christian witnesses can be made through specific prayer?

-Prayer Prompts-

- Distribute the pamphlet "Praying Your Friends to Christ" (free and downloadable at www.namb.net/prayer).
 - Instruct participants to list 5 lost people, three Christian witnesses, and two evangelistic events on the prayer list on the back of the pamphlets.
 - Then ask them to combine their lists and pray together with the other team members.
1. Begin praying for the salvation of the lost people listed.
 2. Pray for the Christian witnesses to have boldness in their witness.
 3. Pray for next Sunday's services, that God would bear evangelistic fruit in lost people's lives.