

Sunday, April 24, 2022 pm

REACHING THE LOST AND PRAYER

Earlier this month, Ken concluded a gospel meeting addressing the subject of evangelism. It is my hope that we were edified and convicted by that series of lessons. We know how important efforts to reach the lost is. And there are many things that could be said about that. I know that in times past I have presented lessons on reaching the lost, and I may resume with these from time to time, as it is an important function of the church and each of us as Christians.

Tonight, I want to focus on one specific area as we think about reaching the lost – prayer. We have emphasized the importance of prayer on numerous occasions. It is how we communicate TO God, but it also serves as a reminder to US of what we need. In looking at my records, about 7 years ago I presented a lesson addressing the subject of prayer and evangelism. I believe it to be a fitting reminder to emphasize this subject again. One reason for this – prayer is something we can all do in this area. So with that in mind, I would like to talk about some things we can pray for where evangelism is concerned.

I. The importance of prayer

- a. We know how important prayer is. It is how we communicate to God.
- b. We know that God wants us to be praying to Him – 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2, etc.
- c. What can we pray for? Consider Philippians 4:6-7 – in everything by prayer and supplication... 1 John 5:14-15 –
- d. 1 Timothy 2:1-4 – prayers should be offered for all men.

II. For God's will to be done

- a. The Lord's model prayer - "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" Matthew 6:10
- b. We know that God wants the lost to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4). AND we know that He has always depended on us to do our part. Recall that in the Bible there is not a single act of conversion that did not involve a man teaching the plan. This includes – Cornelius, Paul, the Eunuch, etc.
- c. We also know that in such endeavors we need His help - 1 Corinthians 3:5-7 – let us never forget that all we can do is plant and water, but God gives the increase.
- d. IF we are genuinely praying that His will be done, we will obey Him by doing our part – what we can, including in the area of reaching the lost. Our prayers ought to be a reminder to us, and a request of Him that such be possible.

III. For myself

- a. For purity in our own lives – until we are truly converted it is not going to be as important as it ought to be.
 - i. IF I have sin, I need forgiveness.
 - ii. How can I expect God to be with me when I am living in sin, rebellion or apathetic to Him?
 - iii. So, the first thing I personally need to pray for is forgiveness when needed – Acts 8:22, 1 John 1:9, etc.
- b. For wisdom –
 - i. James 1:5 – if you lack wisdom, ask of God.
 - ii. John 12:32 – if we are to reach the lost effectively, it is not going to be with gimmicks. Rather it needs to be by lifting Jesus up. While He was speaking of being crucified, the point is, we need to point men to Jesus if we are to gain genuine and convicted prospects. You don't win souls with exclusively emotional appeals, entertainment, social actions or by concealing the difficult parts ahead of time
 - iii. It takes wisdom to know what to say and when to say it.

- c. For knowledge – by this I do not mean miraculous guidance, but rather the ability and opportunity to learn what I need to know to teach others. The only way we are going to know what we need to know is by taking time to learn God’s word, both what it says and how to use it to teach others. 2 Timothy 2:15 – we want to rightly divide the word of truth; Hebrews 5:12 – by this time we ought to be teachers, 2 Peter 3:18 – we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; 1 Peter 3:15 – we are to be ready to give a defense for the hope that is in us with meekness and fear, etc.
- d. For open doors – opportunities.
 - i. The idea of open doors in the NT is associated with opportunities – Acts 14:27 – Paul and Barnabas in Antioch reported how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles; 1 Corinthians 16:9 – Paul speaks of a great and effective door that had been opened to him; 2 Corinthians 2:12 – he speaks of a specific door opened to him while at Troas; Revelation 3:8 – the church at Philadelphia (Asia Minor) had an open door that no one could shut.
 - ii. We are to praying that God would open doors for us - Colossians 4:3
 - iii. If you are genuinely interested in reaching others, ask God to open a door for you to reach someone. AND then be willing to walk through it.
 - iv. Also consider, to find the open door, you may have to try a few “doorknobs” to find it. IOW, be looking!
- e. For courage and boldness –
 - i. This is an area where many of us are struggling – nobody likes to be rejected and most are apprehensive about starting a conversation where the outcome is uncertain, especially if it can potentially lead to confrontation or negative consequences. And such is the case in the society we are living in. Many are not naturally conversation starters – especially with strangers.
 - ii. BUT, if we are to find someone to teach the truth to, we have to be work at overcoming our fears. Philippians 1:19-20 – with boldness Paul desired to magnify Christ. Acts 5:29 – facing threats and beatings, Peter with boldness declared “we ought to obey God rather than men”, etc.
 - iii. Paul prayed for boldness and asked others to pray for Him that he might be bold – Ephesians 6:18-20. Colossians 4:2-4 – after addressing the “open door”, he desired that he would make manifest, as he ought to speak the message of Christ, even in chains. Acts 4:29 after Peter and John were arrested, threatened and released, they reported to the disciples in Jerusalem and then prayed for boldness as they spoke the word.
- f. For those we know personally who are seeking
 - i. Many of Paul’s letters and prayers included specific individuals. We know he was concerned about both congregations and brethren. He prayed for them all.
 - ii. If we are trying to reach someone, will we pray for them individually and often? And in so doing consider what I have just talked about – opportunities (open doors), boldness to say what needs to be said, that their hearts will be receptive, for wisdom and knowledge to say the right thing and be prepared to reach them, etc.
- g. I need to believe that what I am praying for is possible
 - i. Philippians 4:13 notes that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”
 - ii. James 1:5-9, as we ask for wisdom, we ask in faith with no doubting
 - iii. Hebrews 10:22, *let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

IV. For laborers

- a. For more laborers – Luke 10:2 – Jesus told His disciples as He sent them out 2 by 2 to pray to send forth laborers. NOTE: Jesus prayed this AS they were being sent. We always need MORE!

- b. For those who are preaching/teaching the lost – Paul continually asked brethren to pray for them. 2 Thessalonians 3:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:25, Colossians 4:3, etc.
- c. For wisdom and knowledge to know what to do to help – this goes back to something I can personally pray for. Even in those circumstances where I am not directly involved in teaching someone else, can I support others who are?
 - i. Resources to help them – whether financially or otherwise.
 - ii. Words of encouragement for those who are doing the work
 - iii. Ways that I can support them –

V. For the church to open and receptive

- a. When we understand what the church is (including the local church), we know it is a part of God’s plan and intended for saints (Ephesians 3:10-11). A local congregation is designed to build up saints in that location, to do and support the work of reaching the lost.
- b. That we be pure and right in God’s eyes –
 - i. Ephesians 5:25-27 – Jesus gave Himself for the church (which He purchased with His own blood – Acts 20:28, cf. Ephesians 1:22-23 – it is His body and He is head) that she might be pure, clean, sanctified, glorious and without spot or blemish. Our job is to strive and keep her that way.
 - ii. When we win souls to Christ and introduce them to the body of Christ, we want it to be His church. Not a body filled with error and corruption. Consider Matthew 23:13, 15 – they traveled land and sea to win them to their way and in the process made them twice as much sons of hell as themselves.
 - iii. With humility, we should continually be praying to God that we are striving to be the true church of Christ we read of in scripture.
- c. That we be genuine – God despises the hypocrite. The church at Sardis (Revelation 3:1) had a name that they were alive, but they were dead; The church at Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-17) was lukewarm; The church at Corinth was filled with all sorts of problems that needed to be worked through, etc. ***If we are to win souls, we need to be genuine*** – not going through the motions, etc. People need to see that we REALLY do care about each other – 1 Corinthians 12:25, cf. Philippians 2:20 – Timothy sincerely cared for their state.
- d. That we be loving and united toward one another – John 13:34-35 – just remember the world is watching. In our recent gospel meeting it was noted that when people visit the 2 things they look for the most – that we are genuine and that we truly love each other. Ephesians 4:3, Hebrews 13:1 – Let brotherly love continue; 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 – see that it increases more and more, etc.
- e. That we desire to grow – again, like Thessalonica, the word should flow from us – 1 Thessalonians 1:8, Revelation 3:8 – an open door that no one could shut; consider the example of Jerusalem as they continued to increase in the faith, yet they kept praying so that they could increase – Acts 4:29-31, etc.
- f. That we open and willing to grow – we need to want to grow. A congregation needs to be receptive to the lost. And we need to understand that often when people come to the Lord, they have baggage. Are we willing to help them work through their struggles, ignorance and immaturity?

VI. For the lost

- a. Romans 10:1 – this was Paul’s prayer. It is implied in the great commission – Mark 16:15-16.
- b. For proper attitudes toward the lost – a realization that they are lost and a willingness to do whatever we can to bring them to the Lord – consider Jude 22-23, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, etc.
- c. For God to open hearts – 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2, Paul requests prayers that the word of God may run swiftly and be glorified...
- d. For those who are empty and searching for something meaningful – while in the minority, there are souls searching. Will we reach out to them?

- e. For those who have wandered away – James 5:19-20 – if one wanders, we are to strive to bring them back; 1 John 5:16-17 speaks of sin not leading to death (and sin leading to death). We pray for a brother sinning a sin not leading to death – I believe this is reference to one who is in need of returning and will respond. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 speaks of warning the unruly, upholding the weak, comfort the fainthearted, etc. Certainly prayer is a method including in this.

VII. For our leaders and country

- a. For the freedom to continue to proclaim the gospel – we are blessed to still live in a country where we can openly profess our faith. While politically incorrect in many cases, we can publicly proclaim Jesus. But times are changing, and it is possible that in the near future we will lose some of our freedoms. Let us pray that we may continue to freely worship AND for other parts of the world that they will be granted freedom to worship God and follow Jesus.
- b. For our rulers to lead a quiet and peaceable life as Christians –
 - i. We are told to pray for them - 1 Timothy 2:1-2
 - ii. 2 Thess. 3:1-3 – that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified.

VIII. For proper attitudes

- a. Gratitude – for what has already been done, etc. As we pray asking God’s help and guidance, thank Him and believe. 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Colossians 3:17 - do all in his name giving thanks...; Philippians 4:6 – in everything with prayer and thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God...
- b. Patience - let us pray for patience in dealing with others. James 5:7-8 calls for us to be patient until the Lord comes. Be patient and establish your hearts...; Romans 12:12 – being patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer. As you study and try to reach others, it often takes time – sometimes a lot of time. We need to be careful to not press too quickly (but not too slowly either). Prayer for patience and wisdom together.
- c. Endurance -that we not give up - Galatians 6:9, Luke 18:1 – Jesus taught a parable about persistence. As we strive to reach the lost, it can be easy to become discouraged. But we must NOT give up. Pray for strength to endure.

These are some things we can pray for as we strive to reach the lost. The point is, do NOT try and go at it without God on your side. He has made the avenue of prayer available. He expects you to use it properly. Do you pray as you ought to for others? Think about it!