

Practicing This One Thing:
How to Pray for Unbelievers (The Lost)
Romans 9:1-5, Romans 10:1

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Text Introduction: We are in the middle of a prayer challenge. We are calling our challenge “This One Thing.” This is not only guiding our times together on Sunday morning as we examine the Scriptures about prayer, but we are also challenging one another about our discipline and habits of prayer. And what a time it is to pray! I could not have imagined the importance of this effort when God birthed this in my heart early this summer. But, now, all of this makes perfect sense, right?

In recent weeks, we have built a theology of prayer. We started with Jesus’ admonition that His House should be a House of Prayer. We have considered Jesus’ example and the Early Church’s example. In the most recent weeks, we have considered answered prayer and unanswered prayer. We examined that we can put ourselves in a position for God to answer our prayer, and we have learned that we must trust God when our prayers go unanswered.

Beginning today, we shift our focus from theology to specific practices of prayer. Specifically, we are going to consider how to pray in particular circumstances and for particular people, beginning today with praying for unbelievers. The Bible gives us the word “lost” to describe the person not believing in Jesus, so we can think of it as praying for the lost.

Let’s start with a couple of passages from Romans. These two passages show us the incredible passion of Paul toward praying for the lost.

Text: I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience is testifying to me with the Holy Spirit—²that I have intense sorrow and continual anguish in my heart. ³For I could almost wish to be cursed and cut off from the Messiah for the benefit of my brothers, my own flesh and blood. ⁴They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple service, and the promises. ⁵The ancestors are theirs, and from them, by physical descent, came the Messiah, who is God over all, praised forever. Amen.

Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God concerning them is for their salvation!

Introduction: Would you do something as we begin. I think it best if you write this down, but if you can’t do that, at least, think on it. I want you to write down the name of a person who is not a believer in Jesus. Who should you write down? Let the Holy Spirit guide you. This could be and will likely be a loved one. This may be a leader. This might be a neighbor. I want to help us in a very practical way think about how to pray for these individuals.

Paul, once named Saul, knew what it meant to be lost (unbelieving) and as he wrote this passage before us today, knew what it meant to be a believer in Jesus (saved). And, as he wrote to the Philippians, he knew that everything that was a part of his life before believing in Christ was rubbish.

His testimony of prayer for his Jewish brothers and sisters is very helpful to us in formulating a plan to pray for the lost.

We must pray according to a great passion for the souls of the lost.

Where does this passion come from? We have to see lostness. We have to sense lostness. We must remember what it feels like to be lost. We have to live in the reality that lost people go to hell and stay there forever.

If that stark reality does not give us a passion for praying for the lost, nothing will.

We must pray according to the promises of Scripture.

God loves the lost. John 3:16

“For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

God calls the lost. Rev. 3:20

Listen! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and have dinner with him, and he with Me.

God desires that the lost should be saved. 2 Peter 3:9, 1 Timothy 2:1-4

The Lord does not delay His promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.

First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, ²for kings and all those who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, ⁴who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

God and His angels rejoice when the lost are saved. Luke 15

I tell you, in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who don't need repentance.

I tell you, in the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who repents.”

We must pray according to the principles of our own salvation.

For purposes of simplicity, practicality, usefulness, and memory, let me offer just a simple little acrostic to guide our praying using the word “Lost.”

L—We must pray that the person realizes that he/she is lost.

O—Pray that other believers would build relationships, witness, and come into contact with the one for whom you are praying.

S—Pray that the person will be sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

T—Pray that the person's life will be transformed by the Gospel after salvation.

So What?

Start a list. You have a list of sick people. Start a list of lost people.

Seek to be part of the answer to your own prayer. Pray for boldness and opportunity.

Struggle to never be a stumbling block. That is make sure your life's witness is not a distraction or a deterrent to a person becoming a Christian. Paul focused on this. He said,

Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:27)

Dwight Moody said, "The preaching that this world needs most is the sermons in shoes that are walking with Jesus Christ." What sermon will you preach today?

Conclusion:

You want some good news? Our loved ones may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons, but they are helpless against our prayers. Let me close with a couple of stories.

A long time ago, a young girl named Monica was born into a moderately wealthy family. She was raised by a Christian maidservant and influenced Monica to faith in Christ. Monica, though, lived in a time and a region of arranged marriages. Her family gave her in marriage to an unbeliever. But, she began to pray for her husband and children. She particularly prayed for a son, who though she tried to raise in the instructions of Christ, spurned all instruction. Instead of following the teachings of his mother and Christ, he followed the ways of the world. He lived with a woman not his wife and fathered a child with her. He continued to reject the message of Christ in spite of his mother's best arguments. But, all the while she prayed. In fact, she determined never to stop praying, often weeping. Before she died, she did have the opportunity to see her son become a believer in Jesus. In fact, he became a great and well known theologian. One of his contemporaries said of him, He "established anew the ancient faith." You know him as Augustine. His writings influenced the leaders of the Reformation. He wrote in one of his great works, *Confessions*, of his mother's tears "now gone from my sight, who for years had wept over me, that I might live in your [God's] sight."

George Mueller was an evangelist, known for orphan care, and a great man of prayer. After his death, his children went through his prayer journals and numbered his answered prayer to be in the range of 50,000.

About praying for the lost, he wrote: "I am now, in 1864, waiting upon God for certain blessings, for which I have daily besought Him for 19 years and 6 months, without one day's intermission. Still the full

answer is not yet given concerning the conversion of certain individuals. In the meantime, I have received daily, without intermission, for the conversion of others individuals about ten years, for others six or seven years, for others four, three, and two years, for others about 18 months; and still the answer is not yet granted, concerning these persons...Yet I am daily continuing in prayer and expecting the answer...Be encouraged, dear Christian reader, with fresh earnestness to give yourself to prayer, if you can only be sure that you ask for things which are for the glory of God.¹

¹ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 69. From the Autobiography of George Mueller.