

How Important Is Prayer In The Work Of Evangelism?

"You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed....Prayer is striking the winning blow...service is gathering up the results" (A quote from S. D. Gordon).¹

Prayer is...

- work (Colossians 4v12)²
- talking to God
- worship
- Intercession, where, we come before God pleading on behalf of someone. It is also known as standing in the gap (Ezekiel 22v30)³
- spiritual warfare, where we fight against the schemes of the evil one

Evangelism is ...

- the sharing of good news
- 'Overflow' where it is natural, and spontaneous.⁴
- 'One beggar telling another beggar where to get bread.' Telling someone else where they can be satisfied! ⁵
- "to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through him, to accept him as their Saviour, and serve him as their King in the fellowship of his Church."⁶

The work of the evil one.

1 John 5v18-20

We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

The devil guards unbelievers from becoming Christians by:

- blinding them to the truth of the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4v4),
- keeping them under his control (1 John 5v19).
- keeping a person bound in the love of sin, and lusts (1 John 2v16, Ephesians 2v3).
- creating animosity between unbelievers and God (Romans 8v7).

Until we realise that the devil and his spirits are the result of dark thoughts, and blindness to the truth of the Gospel, we will be ineffective in our evangelistic strategy. Any attempts to bring someone to Christ without first binding the evil one, will only make him angry and guard his owner all the more.⁷

The Work of The Holy Spirit

John 16v7b-8

Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

¹ D. Sheets, *Intercessory Prayer*, 23.

² J. Penn-Lewis, *Prayer and Evangelism*, 5.

³ C. P. Wagner, *Prayer Shield*, 22.

⁴ M. Green, *Evangelism Through The Local Church*, 8-9.

⁵ M. Green, *Evangelism Through The Local Church*, 8-9.

⁶ A quote from Archbishop William Temple, Towards the conversion Of England

⁷ J. Penn-Lewis, *Prayer and Evangelism*, 39.

When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment:

It is the Holy Spirit, who convicts a person of their sin, and guilt. Once the person is convicted, it is then their choice to become a Christian. Thus, "Our prayers cannot and will not wrench someone free from the grip of sin and the power of Satan."⁸

Jesus reveals that it was due to the Spirit that enabled Him to fulfil His God-given purpose. Luke 4v18-19 states

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

In addition, He regularly went and had time alone with God to be refreshed, refilled, and refocused so that He could fulfil the plans and purposes of our Father.

"... We who have the Holy Spirit must constantly seek His presence and His control of our lives by fervent prayer (Luke 11v5-13). Without this heavenly anointing, there is only an earthly work. Our words have no power unless the Spirit speaks through us, and they have no effect unless the Spirit applies them to men's hearts."⁹ Therefore, it is crucial that we constantly seek a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit daily in our lives. We need to spend time with God allowing the Holy Spirit to minister to our hearts and minds, surrendering to Him, allowing Him to have control of our lives. We need to get out of the Spirit's way so that He can speak and act through us and apply the truth to the hearts of those around us.

Millar states, "God provides a means for us to appropriate the Spirit's power in our lives and a means for non-Christians to be prepared to receive the Word. That means is prayer. It breaks down our self-sufficiency. It is our door of access to the Heavenly Father through which, as His adopted sons and daughters, we receive His grace to do His work. Again, it is the Holy Spirit who brings our prayers to the Father. ... The Spirit warms our hearts to approach the Father and makes intercession for us so that our prayers may be heard. The Church picture by Luke is first and foremost a confident, expected Church because it is a dependent, praying Church. These Christians had been shown the vital link between prayer for grace and the work God gave them to do."¹⁰

How do we pray

Prayer, intercession and proclaiming the promises of God ripens the harvest ready for reaping. It also gives a power, a boldness that activates the labours into action. Thus, one important aspect of prayer, is praying for those that are taking the message. Actually, the Bible seems to suggest that we are to pray for them more than the unconverted (Matthew 9v37-38, Ephesians 6v19-20, Colossians 4v2-6). "This is because the Bible sees conversion as the work of the Spirit – hence if those who bring the Word of God to people are filled with the Spirit, so God's Spirit is released and opens hardened hearts, deaf ears and blind eyes."¹¹ However, Dunn states, "When we pray

⁸ T. White, *The believers Guide To Spiritual Warfare*, 123.

⁹ C. J. Millar, *Powerful Evangelism For The Powerless*, 62.

¹⁰ C. J. Millar, *Powerful Evangelism For The Powerless*, 60-61.

¹¹ J. John, *Natural Evangelism*, 151.

for the lost to be saved, we are praying within the revealed will of God. To say that we may not pray for the lost to be saved is to deny ourselves the mightiest power God has given us to accomplish our greatest task."¹²

Silvoso explains that in 1 Timothy 2v1-8, Paul was not talking about starting a prayer meeting. Instead, Paul is urging the people to meet in a citywide prayer strategy.

- v1 - Paul asks Timothy to organise men and women so that prayers are being said everywhere, and that everyone in the City is being prayed for.
- v2 – This includes those who are in authority, those playing important roles that affect the City, and its people. Why?
 - Those in authority affect the lives of those living in the City.
 - That those in authority are weak, and cannot humanly address all the problems, or know how to do so.
 - Those in authority are under the influence of the evil one. "Like ivy plants clinging to walls, demonic forces attach themselves to governments and those in positions of prominence in order to influence by proxy.... The World system is under the evil one (see 1 John 2:16) and evil structures operate alongside political ones. This is where the action is today as far as spiritual warfare in our Cities is concerned."¹³
- In addition, v2 states "so that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." Silvoso states that this does not mean that non- Christians will leave us alone. It simply means "pray that everybody in your city, and especially those in authority, will become Christians!"¹⁴
- V3 & 4 – God wants all men to be saved. However, it would seem that there is one thing lacking – prayer for all men, prayer to see the saved lost.¹⁵

One thing that we can be sure of is that God does hear our prayers, and that He does answer (1 John 5v14-15), though within His timing! Without intercession, we are often inactive, or see little fruit. However, once we seek God, and are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit we are activated with such boldness that we cannot be silenced.¹⁶

A Word of Warning

We need to be careful that our prayers are not prayers of trying to twist God's arm. Legg draws upon the parable Jesus told in Luke 11v5-8. He concludes with three helpful lessons¹⁷: -

- Acknowledge that our cupboards are bare – we do not have the resources to bring people to God, but God has!
- Examine your attitude to God – the man does not forcefully seek what he wants, but humbly pleads for the bread.
- Pray persistently – the man keeps knocking – we are also to keep praying.

Binding The Evil One!

Penn-Lewis states, "The Gospel should not be proclaimed to the unsaved – thus attacking the "house" of the "strong man" – without first by united and believing prayer binding the strong man. The evil one is present at every seed-sowing of the Word of Life so as to "snatch away" the seed immediately (Matthew 13v19)! Prayer against him protects the message."¹⁸

¹² R. Dunn, *Don't Just Stand There Pray Something!*, 110.

¹³ E. Silvoso, *That None Should Perish*, 68.

¹⁴ E. Silvoso, *That None Should Perish*, 69.

¹⁵ E. Silvoso, *That None Should Perish*, 66-69

¹⁶ C. J. Millar, *Powerful Evangelism For The Powerless*, 64.

¹⁷ J. John, *Calling Out*, 203.

¹⁸ J. Penn-Lewis, *Prayer and Evangelism*, 45.

As believers, Jesus gave the authority to go and stamp out the devil and evil spirits, where upon we also are told no harm will come to us (Luke 10v3, 19). Thus, we should not be fearful of praying against the devil, or his schemes, but go with the confidence of the Lord. Matthew 18v19-20 says: -

“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

Thus, the evil one will attempt to divide God’s people, preventing united prayer, and a victory for God.¹⁹ Today, less than 10% of the church in the UK attend a weekly prayer meeting.

We need to keep praying, no matter how hard it gets, standing firm on the knowledge that “The prayer in Jesus’ name drives the enemy off the battlefield of man’s will and leaves him free to choose right.” (Quoted from S. D. Gordon).²⁰

Conclusion! How important is prayer in the work of Evangelism?

John Wesley states,

“It seems God is limited by our prayer life – that he can do nothing for humanity unless someone asks him.”

Legg concludes,

“If that’s the case, let’s ask him to intervene in situations, in very specific ways.”²¹

Let’s not stop meeting together to pray specifically for our neighbourhood in united prayer.

¹⁹ J. Penn-Lewis, *Prayer and Evangelism*, 45.

²⁰ R. Dunn, *Don’t Just Stand There Pray Something!*, 121.

²¹ S. Legg, *The Ultimate Guide To Sharing Your Faith*, 121.