

Should We Pray for the Lost?

By Jonathan Graf

I have a close friend who believes that we do not need to pray for the lost. His reasoning is that nowhere in scripture does it say that we are to pray for the lost. There are commands to pray for a few things—the peace of Jerusalem, laborers for the harvest, pray for your enemy—but nowhere does it command us to pray for the lost.

I had to gently disagree with my friend, but I can understand a little of his thinking. Nowhere is there a direct command, “pray for the lost,” but we pray for a lot of things where there is not a direct command to do so. There are, however, some very clear evidences that Paul prayed for the lost.

While Paul was considered a missionary to the Gentiles, he had a burden for his own people who failed to recognize Jesus as the Christ, their Messiah. “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved” (Rom. 10:1). I don’t think this “heart’s desire and prayer” was just a passing fancy. He wasn’t using the word prayer like we often do “I pray that doesn’t happen” meaning we are not really praying about this, but we hope something doesn’t happen. Paul was praying for his people!

In another passage, Paul asked believers to pray for enablement and empowerment for him in his ministry of declaring the gospel. “Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel” (Eph. 6:19). Certainly not a challenge to pray for the lost, but clearly in that general arena.

He brings up prayer for the lost one more time—this one a little more direct:

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

The idea here is that we pray for certain things so men are more likely to come to a knowledge of the truth. Pray for national leadership—for peace and prosperity—so they will govern in a way that will allow people to live normal lives. This, indicated Paul, will bring people to a knowledge of the truth.

One of the interesting things I see here is that in two of these passages (Ephesians and 1 Timothy) Paul is not directly praying for the lost. He is praying for outside conditions to be manipulated so the situation is ripe for people to come into the kingdom.

There is a principle here that may be what my friend was hinting at by his belief that we shouldn’t pray for the lost. I am not a

theologian so I do not understand all the free-will vs. sovereignty of God arguments between differing camps. But I understand that God has given men enough free-will to chose whether or not they will follow Jesus Christ.

As we pray for the lost, I believe that God is at work. He is revealing Himself to these individuals; He is bringing people and situations across their paths that might cause them to think more of eternal things. He is thwarting Satan's grip on them and for a time, shining light into their hearts. But He will not force them to choose Him. He will not override their free will.

So as we pray for specific lost people, we need to remember that. Is what we are asking in line with what God would do in pursuit of this person. Or are our prayers attempting to manipulate the person's free will?

Get People Praying

Since most of our people do not understand the importance of praying regularly for specific lost people, we need to help them catch a vision wherever possible. There are some excellent prayer resources available to help do this. I highly recommend checking out the following products (all are available at www.prayershop.org).

Paths of Gold.

This Pray! Books product includes 46 scripture-based prayers to pray for a specific lost friend.

Ways to Pray series.

Produced by prayerwalking expert Steve Hawthorne and Waymakers, this series includes 6 booklets with scripture based prayers and thoughts to pray for your neighborhood and community. Salvation and transformation prayer are central to their content.

Praying for Your

Unsaved Family and Friends. A brochure produced by Harvest Prayer Ministries the includes prayers for the lost. Can be purchased in quantity or in pdf format with permission to print what you need.

Lighthouse of Prayer

Materials. This initiative has multiple products and guides to help people pray for the lost: "Five Blessing" brochure and "Praying the Lord's Prayer for Your Neighbors" are the most effective. One of the Lighthouse resources is Developing a Prayer, Care, Share Lifestyle. This devotional book is on super special for the month of October 2007. Read "Super Special on Prayer Evangelism Resource."