

LEARNING TO PRAY

Praying for the Lost

PRIMARY TEXTS: 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; 2 Timothy 2:25b-26; James 5:16b

INTRODUCTION: Write the names of four lost people below.

1. Your closest relative who is lost _____
2. Your closest friend who is lost _____
3. The lost person who lives close to you _____
4. The name of another lost person whose life often crosses yours (barber or beautician, a fellow employee, a customer) _____

It is good to pray for the people of the world who are lost. It is better to pray for specific lost people because then we can pray specifically. But how do you pray for a lost person and what can you know about the answer to your prayer?

I. A FOREGROUND OF FACTS

Usually we speak of laying a background. We need here to lay a foreground, because these facts of Scripture must be at the forefront of our minds all the while we are learning about and practicing prayer for the lost.

A. God's Will

1 Timothy 2:4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

What is God's will for the four people whose names you have privately written?
God's desire is that every person would be saved.

B. Man's Will

Genesis 1:26 tells us that man and woman were made in the image of God. What does that statement mean?

In addition to many other things, it implies that man shares the attributes of God. We do not fully possess the divine attributes, but we have a “likeness” of them.

God’s Attribute	Man’s Likeness
Trinity: Father, Son, Spirit	Triune composition: body, soul, spirit
Omniscient (all knowing)	Capacity to learn
Omnipresent (everywhere at once)	Mobility
Omnipotent (all powerful)	Strength

What is man’s characteristic which is a likeness to God’s divine attribute of sovereignty? The answer is man’s free will: his ability to choose, to decide.

Sovereignty	Choice, Free Will
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God did not have to make humans with free will, but He chose to do so. God does not force man or woman in their actions or decisions. He allows them to decide.

God wants every person to be saved, but He allows every person to decide whether they will receive His salvation.

C. God’s Will for Man’s Will

Why do you think God created mankind?

Let me suggest a reason: God created mankind so that He would have someone on whom to bestow His love. Since man was made in God’s image, he also had the capacity to love. But the capacity to love combined with the ability to choose produces the capability of refusing to love. Man and woman were designed to be the recipients of God’s love with the choice of loving God in return or refusing to love Him.

God could have made people so that they automatically loved Him, honored Him, glorified Him, praised Him, and served Him. But that was not God’s will. God’s will was that man would decide to love God, honor and glorify Him, praise and serve Him.

How does God’s will and your will line up right now?

As we pray for the lost, we must remember that **God's desire is not merely that they surrender to the Lordship of Christ, but that they desire to so surrender and thus be saved.**

We might ask at this point why praying for the lost would do any good since God already wills for them to be saved and since they must of their own volition choose to trust Christ as Lord. What part does prayer have? If indeed the only parties involved in the transaction of salvation were God and the believer, prayer might not be needed. But there is another who is very interested.

D. The Devil's Will

Satan is the third personality who must also be considered. Satan rebelled against God because Satan wanted to exalt himself above God. After God cast Satan down, Satan began a campaign to entice man to also rebel against God. Satan does not have the power to force man's will but he does possess power to tempt man with the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and pride of life."

For every individual there is a great battle raging. God uses His angels to protect and bless and to work events in people's lives to demonstrate both His righteousness and mercy. The Holy Spirit works directly in the heart to convict a person of his sin and draw him to commit his life to Jesus and thereby be saved. Satan and his demons introduce doubt, dismay, discord, and disbelief in hopes of leading a man or woman to reject the leading of God's Holy Spirit.

It is my personal belief that in the early stages of this battle the drawing of the Holy Spirit will far overpower the deceitfulness of Satan. That is why most children after reaching an age of understanding readily respond to the gospel when presented to them. But **if** in these early days, the wooing of **the Holy Spirit is rejected** either by neglect, ignorance, or repulsion, **then the soul of man becomes increasingly more resistant to God's drawing and more responsive to the devil's lies.** The Bible speaks of the power of Satan over those who will listen to him.

2 Timothy 2:25b-26 ...if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,²⁶ and *that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.*

It is at the point of counteracting the work of Satan to delude a person into rejecting Christ that our prayer can be of critical importance.

II. THE PRAYER FOR THE LOST

A. What the prayer does.

Why does our prayer affect what Satan can do in leading a person to reject Jesus?

The answer takes us back to our understanding of prayer. Prayer is a partnership which God extended to us when He gave us dominion over the earth. By His choice, we share His role and He has limited Himself by requiring our participation concerning things of this world. Now Satan is operating on our turf. He has no rightful claim to this world. He can only operate in our territory as we allow him to do so. **Especially concerning those people for whom we have direct responsibility (and thus dominion) such as a parent for a child or a husband for a wife, we can cosign with God that Satan has no right to be influencing that person and ask God to destroy Satan's influence and cast him away.**

B. Making the prayer effective.

Listen carefully! We can pray anytime, anywhere, under any circumstance. But not just any prayer accomplishes the results for which it was prayed.

James 5:16b The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

We cannot tell God that Satan has no right to influence someone in our sphere of influence if we have given the devil the right by bringing sin into our life. Even if you are saved, **if you are giving place to sin then you are giving the devil the right of influence.** If you harbor bitterness, you give place to Satan. If you are engrossed in love for the things of this world you give the prince of the world the right of influence in the things around you.

If we want to get serious about praying for lost folks we love, we better have a cleansing. We better confess our sins using 1 John 1:9. We better get rid of those provisions we have made for fleshly desires as commanded in Romans 13:14 and use the mighty weapons of God to have strongholds destroyed in our lives according to 2 Corinthians 10:4. **Until we have taken away the territory of our own lives that we have surrendered to Satan, we will not be very effective in forbidding his working elsewhere.**

Conclusion: Look at the people whose names you wrote at the beginning of this lesson. If you followed the instructions, they are people for whom you have some direct responsibility either by blood kinship or earthly relationship. In one way or another they are in your "territory" for which God has given you dominion. If you really want to see those folks saved, do this:

- 1. Let God cleanse your life and keep it clean, denying Satan all access to your territory.**
- 2. Pray as a child of God and His partner that now God will make ineffective all of Satan's lies and deception directed at this person.** Ask God to ban Satan from influencing or persuading that person in any way. Ask God to destroy the effects of Satan's work to this point in the believer's life and to give the person an ear to hear the gospel.

Now the Holy Spirit can speak and the word heard by the one you have prayed for can be unmixed. He must still choose to exercise his own will to trust Christ, but he will be unhindered by the evil one in making his choice.

If you will take these steps in behalf of those whose names you have written on the paper, then write their names in your Bible. Keep your life clean daily and pray daily. Record the dates they are saved. Add others as God impresses you.