



THE PRAYER CLOSET

Encouraging & Equipping Believers in Prayer

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ISSUE 1

YOUR CHURCH: A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR THE LOST

In **1 Timothy 3:14-15**, Paul tells Timothy, "These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." Paul makes it known that he is writing Timothy on how to guide the church. He wants this young pastor to know how the church is to function. He teaches this to Timothy first, "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men" (**1 Timothy 2:1**). Paul instructs Timothy that the church is to be a house of prayer for people – especially those who are lost.

The word "first" in **1 Timothy 2:1** means first in rank. It refers to priority. The Word of God is declaring that prayer is to be priority of the church. The church is to be a house of prayer for all kinds of people with all kinds of needs. Seeking God in behalf of others is the first and great work of the church.

Our God is a saving God. He desires to deliver people from their sin and eternal misery. Because of this, He desires that we pray for the salvation of those who are lost. He longs for us to stand in the gap for those who

are outside of Jesus Christ. His call to the church is to intercede for those who need Christ. This delights His heart and is in line with His merciful character, "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (**1 Timothy 2:3-4**).

The church then has the privilege and responsibility of becoming a house of prayer for the lost. Our churches must become places of prayer for those who need Jesus Christ. This is God's call and the delight of His heart.

The question is then, "How do you build a house of prayer for the lost? How do you guide a prayer ministry, a church, into intercession for the lost across the street and across the world?" This issue of *The Prayer Closet* will focus on leading the church to become a house of prayer for the lost. We will examine what it means to be a house of prayer for the lost. We will also look at tangible steps you can take to lead your prayer ministry or your church to this. It is my hope and prayer that this material will encourage you and provide you with the insight that you need to you aid you in building a house of prayer for those who need Jesus.

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Why Labor To Build A House Of Prayer For The Lost?

Why should a church strive to become a house of prayer for the lost? There are three basic biblical reasons for this. *First, it is the desire and delight of God.* In **1 Timothy 2:1**, we are told that the church should pray for all kinds of people with all kinds of needs. In this same section, Paul refers to God as the Savior (2:3). Of all the needs that a person has, salvation is the greatest need. And it is the great desire of God to save. The combination of this call to pray for people and the emphasis on God being the Savior who desires to save puts praying for the lost as the priority of the church. People have many needs, yet their greatest need is forgiveness and a right relationship with God through faith in Christ. God desires that we pray about this great need in peoples' lives. God delights in it when His church prays for those who need His salvation. The church should intercede concerning all kinds of needs; yet our primary focus in prayer must be the salvation of sinners.

Building a house of prayer is essential to fulfilling the Great Commission. In **Matthew 28:19-20**, Jesus declares that the church is to take the message of Jesus to the masses, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." This can only be accomplished through prayer. The church that desires to fulfill the Great Commission has to become a house of prayer for the lost. It is only as the power of God is released through prayer that the church can carry the message of Jesus to the world, lead them to Christ, and disciple them in the Word. Apart from prayer, the Great Commission is only wishful thinking. Any church that desires to reach out to the lost with the good news of Jesus must become a house of prayer for those who are lost. Prayer unleashes God's power and affects the witnesses, the witness, and those who are hearing the message. Fulfilling the Great

Commission and becoming a house of prayer for the lost go hand in hand.

Building a house of prayer for the lost is obedience to the Great Commandment. In **Matthew 22:37-39**, Jesus says, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." First, we are to love God with all of our beings. If you love God, don't you want to see Him glorified? What glorifies God more than the salvation of sinners? Loving God means that you want to see people saved by God that God might be glorified.

Second, you are to love your neighbor as yourself. You are to seek the highest good for those around you. What greater thing can you do for those around you than pray for their salvation? Loving your neighbor means asking God to have mercy on him and bring him to Christ.

When a church becomes a house of prayer for the lost, it is seeking to obey the Great Commandment of Jesus. It is seeking God's glory through the salvation of sinners. It is also seeking the highest good of those who need Jesus by interceding for their salvation.



The Essential Tools For Building A House Of Prayer For The Lost

In our previous section, we laid a biblical foundation for why you should strive to become a house of prayer for the lost. Now, we need to examine the tools that you need to build this house of prayer for the lost. The following are some essential tools that you will need for this:

➤ *A burden for the lost.*

"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my

brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh" (**Romans 9:1-3**).

This is the first and most crucial tool for building a house of prayer for the lost. The church must have the similar burden that Paul models in these verses. Believers must understand the lostness of those who are outside of Christ. Believers have to accept and know the consequences of rejecting Christ – exclusion from heaven and an eternity in the misery and suffering of hell. This burden will provide the fuel for our praying for those who need Jesus. This provides motivation and direction for our praying. Building a house of prayer for the lost begins with a burden for those who are without Christ.

➤ *Conviction that prayer makes a difference.*
"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved" (**Romans 10:1**).

Another essential tool for building a house of prayer for the lost is the conviction that praying for the lost does make a difference. God has ordained prayer as a part of bringing people to Jesus Christ. It is a necessary part of bringing people to faith in Jesus. Paul sets the example in this verse of Scripture. He desired the salvation of people. Yet, He also prayed for the salvation of those He wanted to see saved. Prayer is a crucial element in seeing people come to Jesus Christ in faith. Believers must be thoroughly convicted of this truth. There can be no doubt or hesitation concerning this point. Building a house of prayer means that you know and trust that your prayers make a difference in the lost.

➤ *Training*

"Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples'" (**Luke 11:1**).

This verse is a powerful reminder that believers must be taught to pray. Prayer is a spiritual discipline that is learned. The believer must grow and mature in prayer. The

same is true of praying for the lost. Believers must be trained in how to seek God for those who need Jesus. They must be instructed and encouraged to seek God in behalf of the lost. Building a house of prayer for the lost means that you provide training for believers in how to intercede for the lost.

➤ *Tangible opportunities*

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (**Matthew 7:7**).

In order to build a house of prayer for the lost, you need to provide tangible opportunities for people to pray for the lost. This means that you have to offer definite opportunities for people to practice evangelistic prayer. When a church is a house of prayer for the lost, there are tangible ways that people stand in the gap for the lost. It's not enough to say, "We need to pray for the lost. We need to pray for our community." There must be practical, tangible opportunities to pray specifically for those who need Jesus.



Objections To Building A House Of Prayer For The Lost

When I have dealt with the subject of building houses of prayer for the lost, there are some objections that are made. These objections basically focus on praying for the lost. But, they will surface when you attempt to lead a church in being a house of prayer for the lost.

Objection # 1:

"Where are we taught in the Bible to pray for the lost?"

There is no specific command to pray for the lost. You will not read in the Word, "You shall pray for the lost." Yet, the Word is filled with numerous truths that clearly point to the necessity of intercession for those who need Jesus.

Romans 10:1 – The apostle Paul revealed that he prayed for the lost. Obviously Paul saw the necessity of praying for lost people. If the apostle Paul saw a need for this, praying for the lost cannot be ignored. It must be a part of our praying.

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 – In this text, Paul asks the Thessalonians to pray for his labors in Corinth. In these verses, Paul connects evangelistic effectiveness with fervent prayer. He makes it known that prayer was crucial to his declaration of the gospel in Corinth, “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith” (**2 Thessalonians 3:1-2**). Paul asks them to pray that “the word of the Lord may run swiftly.” He wants them to pray that people will be open and receptive to the good news of Jesus. He also wants them to pray that the word of the Lord would “be glorified.” This means that he wants it to change the lives of the Corinthians. He desired that they receive the good news of Jesus and that they experience salvation through it. He calls on the Thessalonians to pray that they will believe the gospel and will be transformed by it. There is an inseparable connection between prayer and the lost coming to Christ.

Matthew 9:37-38 – In this text, Jesus commands us to pray for laborers, “Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. “Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (**Matthew 9:37-38**). Christ calls on us to pray for laborers to go out into the harvest. If we are to pray for laborers, shouldn't we also pray for the harvest? If we pray for people to go out into the harvest, should we not also pray for the people that they are striving to reach?

Colossians 4:3 – “Meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains.” In this text, Paul connects prayer and open doors for witness. He states that only prayer could prepare people to hear

and receive the good news of Jesus. Prayer is crucial in people hearing and receiving the good news of Jesus.

Matthew 23:37 & Romans 9:1-3 – In these texts, we see Jesus and Paul agonizing over lost people. They are burdened and broken over the lostness of people. We know that any person outside of Christ is lost and headed for an eternity of misery in hell. That should break us and stir us to do all that we can to lead others to Christ, which includes praying fervently for them. Although there is no direct command to pray for the lost, shouldn't their condition and future state drive us to seek God in their behalf?

Objection # 2

Does praying for lost people really make a difference?

The answer to this question is an emphatic “Yes!” Praying for lost people does make a difference. This is revealed to us in the Scripture. In **2 Thessalonians 3:1-2**, Paul asks the Thessalonian church to pray for his labors in Corinth. He wanted them to pray for open and receptive hearts and that obstacles to the good news would be taken out of their lives. The Word of God tells us in **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” Paul says, “*And such were some of you.*” These Corinthians had been ungodly and wicked; yet now they had believed the good news of Jesus and had been transformed by it. **This is exactly what the Thessalonians had prayed for!** They prayed for changed lives in Corinth and it became a reality! Praying for lost people does make a difference.