

## CHAPTER 2

# Praying Effective Evangelistic Prayers

**W**hat comes to your mind when you think of evangelistic prayer? Whenever I ask people “What is the last evangelistic prayer the Lord answered in your life?” the answers I hear are similar. A few people recount wonderful stories of friends or relatives finally coming to know the Lord, often after years and years of praying. These answers to prayer are encouraging to all of us. Many people, however, simply stare at me. They rarely have had an evangelistic prayer answered, and as a result, they have given up praying for others.

### **Am I Praying Correctly?**

Perhaps one reason we see so few answers to evangelistic prayers is because we have never been taught how to pray such prayers. Maybe it has never crossed your mind that God might give you evangelistic prayers that can result in regular answers. But he has.

I am not here to add one more religious duty to your already busy life. Rather, I want to invite you on a personal adventure of praying evangelistic requests that God will regularly answer. The most important change that a tongue-tied Christian can make is to change his or

her evangelistic praying. If our tongues are to become untied, it is not because we will have learned a technique from this or any other book. Our tongues will become untied as we cry out to the one who made us the way we are. Colossians 4:2–4 provides the help we need.

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that *God may open a door for our message*, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. *Pray that I may proclaim it clearly*, as I should.

### Pray for Open Doors

What did Paul understand that we don't? Paul wrote the book of Colossians from Rome after he had completed three highly successful missionary journeys. In spite of his successes, the apostle Paul still felt the need for the prayers of others. Specifically, he felt the need for prayer that God would open a door for the message. Paul understood that for him to proclaim Christ, God would have to open a door. God would open that door only as his people asked him.

We must understand this truth. Our job is to proclaim Christ. But we cannot proclaim Christ until God opens a door. God will not make an opportunity until we ask him. Therefore, like Paul, we need to pray for *open doors*. The process looks like this:

<b>Our job</b>	→	<b>God's job</b>	→	<b>Our job</b>
Pray for open doors		Open the door		Proclaim Christ

Many are discouraged in sharing their faith because they don't understand this supernatural process. Some programs put all the responsibility on proclaiming the message, whether or not there is an opportunity. Other books written by gifted evangelists describe them taking advantage of opportunities you and I would never see.

The key for the tongue-tied Christian is persistent prayer that God will open opportunities for the message. When he answers, we can walk through those doors confidently and graciously, knowing that he gave us the opportunity. When we try to pry open an evangelistic door, it usually results in hard feelings on the other person's part and a bad experience on our part.

When tongue-tied Christians understand this insight from Scripture, there is often an immediate answer to prayer. After one presentation I made of this teaching, I received this e-mail:

What you had to share was both incredibly relevant and fruitful. It has already borne fruit in a woman Ellie has been sharing with. She was praying for open doors for one friend and literally five minutes later this friend called her and asked her to get together. When we pray in God's will, things happen.

I have often prayed that God would open a way for the message. He has been faithful to answer that prayer. I regularly have sensed God's Spirit telling me that there was an opening in front of me. And then I had a choice to walk through that door or not. Some of those answers have been dramatic. Other answers have been more commonplace. But prayer for God to open a way is vital. As you begin praying, you will suddenly see divine "coincidences." But these coincidences only happen to those who pray.

If you truly understand the need to pray for open doors, evangelistic prayer will become an exciting adventure. Now, instead of praying by rote for someone's salvation over and over, you are actually inviting God to invade your world and the circumstances in your life and make an opening for his message. God will answer that prayer before you know it!

### Pray for Ourselves

Not only do we need to be devoted to praying for open doors; we also need to be devoted to praying for *ourselves*. Even after his previous successes, the apostle Paul knew he needed prayer that he might proclaim the mystery of Christ *clearly*. "Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should" (Colossians 4:4). At the end of Ephesians, which he wrote at the same time, Paul asks for prayer that he would proclaim the message *fearlessly*. "Pray that I may declare [the mystery of the gospel] fearlessly, as I should" (Ephesians 6:20).

These are two of the most basic and effective prayers we can pray for ourselves. First, we need to pray to proclaim the message of Christ clearly, so that the unbeliever can understand. Second, we need to pray that we will overcome our fear of rejection and that we will proclaim

the gospel fearlessly. If we have presented the message clearly and fearlessly, God has answered prayer, and we have done our job.

**Pray to proclaim Christ clearly.** Why do we need to proclaim Christ clearly? For most people, the true message of Jesus Christ is still a mystery. Many don't understand who Jesus really is and what he did on the cross. They have all sorts of wrong views. Many people are rejecting a caricatured Jesus from their childhood or a view of Jesus they have gathered from television or magazine articles. If pressed, most would say that Jesus was a great religious teacher. His message, like all great religious men, was to love one another.

Our job is to counter this misunderstanding with the truth of the gospel. The proclamation of truth is the only way that wrong or inadequate views will be challenged. Our responsibility is to make sure that our proclamation is as clear as possible. We cannot control our listeners' reaction to the message, but we can offer an intelligible message to which they can respond. When we have explained Christ clearly, this prayer has been answered.

When God answers this prayer for clarity, what we say will be understandable. It does not mean we have to proclaim the whole message at once. But what we do say must be crystal clear. I know well the feeling of stumbling over my words, trying to explain some part of the gospel. During my explanation, I realized that my words were not clear to me, so how could they be clear to the person I was talking with?

**Pray to proclaim Christ fearlessly.** Likewise, we need to pray for ourselves that we will declare the message fearlessly. Fear of rejection is still the number one barrier to sharing the gospel consistently. The solution is to pray for boldness.

After God had begun teaching me to pray differently, I recognized him opening a door in a conversation at work. As I stood in that co-worker's cubical I was outwardly continuing the conversation, but inwardly I was wrestling with whether to bring up the gospel. In the end, my sinful flesh won, and I left without speaking to her about the gospel. As I went back to the Scriptures in despair, I rediscovered Ephesians 6:20. It gave me great encouragement that the apostle Paul, after proclaiming the message fearlessly to the Roman rulers and the Jews in Jerusalem and Asia Minor, still felt needy enough to ask for prayer to proclaim the message fearlessly. If he needed prayer in this area, how much more did I need it!

Don't misinterpret this prayer for fearlessness as a prayer for arrogance, insensitivity, or rudeness. Later, we will be talking about how to speak to unbelievers. Unfortunately, some Christians equate speaking fearlessly with speaking harshly and insensitively. But Scripture says we are to speak with "gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). An answer to this prayer means we boldly take advantage of doors the Lord opens. It also means we say the hard things that Jesus said in a loving and humble manner. It does not mean we are rude.

### Pray Obstinate

Finally, we need to pray *obstinately*. God instructs us, "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful" (Colossians 4:2). The battle for people's souls is waged in the heavenly realms, and the proclamation of the gospel is opposed by the devil. If the gospel is going to go forward, it is because we are on our knees in prayer. As individuals, as families, as small groups, and as churches, we must be continuously praying that the Lord would open doors for the message and that we would declare the gospel clearly and fearlessly.

**Being watchful and thankful.** But this command to pray is not a repetitive duty. The rest of the verse says we are to be watchful and thankful. Watchful and thankful for what? We are to be watchful and thankful for regular answers to these prayers. That's right—we should expect to see regular answers to our evangelistic prayers! When we don't see regular answers, evangelistic prayer can become a rote duty. When we see frequent answers, prayer becomes a supernatural adventure.

God can answer your evangelistic prayers entirely apart from whether or not people come to Christ. By opening the door for you to proclaim the message, God has answered evangelistic prayer. By making you bolder than you were last time, God has answered evangelistic prayer; and by helping you proclaim Christ more clearly, God has answered evangelistic prayer. We can see regular answers to these prayers, regardless of the response of the ones with whom we talk.

Rather than praying "hope-so" prayers, we are to co-work and cooperate with God by praying smaller prayers where we will recognize answers. As we learn to pray in the Spirit, asking him what to pray for, we will see many answered prayers. Someone coming to Christ is usually the result of many answered prayers for opportunity, clarity, curiosity, wisdom for the next step, insight into the person's

heart, and so forth. When we just pray for someone's salvation, we put all the responsibility on God. When we begin to pray for ourselves, we realize that we also have some responsibility to act.

As tongue-tied Christians, we often desire to pray instead of act. But this Scripture commands us to pray that God will enable us to act. If we ask God to do all the work of salvation and refuse to do our part, this evangelistic partnership will not succeed. If we don't ask God to do anything and rely only on ourselves, this adventure will fail. But if we ask God to do his part and to enable us to do our part, it will succeed.

### Other Ways to Pray

Having emphasized the need to pray obstinately for open doors and ourselves, let's bring some balance. There are other ways we can pray evangelistically.

First, in addition to praying these prayers from Colossians 4:2–4, we can also pray for ability to carry out the *commands* in verses 5 and 6. These would include prayer for insight in how to act wisely toward outsiders and how to make the most of every opportunity. In addition, we can pray for gracious conversations and insight into how to answer each one. We will be discussing these different commands in the following chapters.

Second, we can pray for insight into the *strongholds* that keep our unbelieving friends from coming to Jesus. "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). For different people there are different hindrances to the gospel. For some, the hindrance may be bitterness at God for a past tragedy. For others, it may be pride in learning. For still others, a hindrance may be their love of money. Ask God to give you insight into their particular cause of blindness. Once you have insight into their cause of blindness, you can begin to pray against it.

Third, we can pray for God to guide us to *someone in need*. God often uses pain and need to gain the attention of unbelievers and believers alike. And God often uses his people to minister to that pain in unbelievers. However, if we are too absorbed in our own lives, we will miss these appointments. Praying for God to guide us to someone in need will make us sensitive to the Holy Spirit and others. God will answer that prayer quickly.

As a related prayer, we can ask to be guided to *someone in whom God is already working*. Jesus made clear that one work of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8–11). We can be confident knowing that this invisible work of the Holy Spirit in people's hearts is constantly occurring. We just need to pray that he would guide us to those people.

Fourth, we can pray for an *unbeliever's prayer request*. When an unbeliever shares a need with us, often we don't know what to say. An excellent response is an offer to pray. We will be talking about this again in chapter 7. Our prayer for the person invites God's special blessing upon them. It also gives us a chance to follow up with them in the future. And remember, if we promise to pray, we should keep our promise.

### Practical Helps

How can we make sure we are devoted to evangelistic prayer? Daily pressures can easily crowd out the best intentions. If we devote ourselves to evangelistic prayer, it will be because we have set up a realistic plan with realistic accountability. The following three methods will be helpful in keeping you on track.

The first help is a *physical reminder* to pray regularly. This reminder can be as simple as a notation in your prayer journal, a note on your bureau, or a note at your place of work. Another reminder could be the act of placing a gospel pamphlet in your appointment book each day. Or you could use a devotional prayer guide to help you stay on track. Houses of Prayer Everywhere has two helpful resources. *Praying the Lord's Prayer for Neighbors* is a twenty-eight-day devotional guide that helps you learn to pray the Lord's Prayer for yourself and your neighbors. *Developing a Prayer-Care-Share Lifestyle* is a fifteen-week devotional book that will guide your evangelistic prayer time and will remind you to pray. These physical booklets, kept with your Bible for devotions, will remind you to devote yourself to prayer.

Praying through your day's appointments and errands will help you mentally walk through the day. As you do this, you can invite the Holy Spirit to open doors for the message at each of these places. Or you can invite the Holy Spirit to bring people to you. One of our church's elders was saved as a college student by a Christian woman who did just that. Though homebound due to an illness, she asked

the Lord to send someone to her that she could tell about Jesus. Steve knocked on her door that day ready to make a sales pitch to her. Instead, a little later, he was praying to receive Christ.

A second help that can keep you devoted to prayer is *attendance at a small group meeting*. Whether a Sunday school class or a mid-week home group, almost all small groups have a prayer time. If a group is not reaching out, this prayer time can become ingrown and stale. How much better to use this occasion to bring up biblical evangelistic prayer for open doors, clarity, and fearlessness. Imagine the encouragement all would receive if each time you heard of open doors the Lord gave during the past week. Even if the Lord did not answer your own prayers that week, it will encourage you to hear the reports of others. Not only will this regular meeting remind you to pray, but it will also remind you to be watchful for answers. These regular times of prayer will help keep you accountable.

A third practical help to keep your evangelistic prayer life on track is *covenanting with one or two others* in your church. “Two are better than one . . . if one falls down, his friend can help him up” (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10). Perhaps you know of a few others who are burdened for evangelism in your fellowship. Just a short talk with them every Sunday before or after church can be a quick accountability group. To begin with, try committing yourself to pray once a week for ninety days and see what God does through your prayers.

### The Lord Will Answer Biblical Prayer

The most important part of this passage in Colossians is “being watchful and thankful.” If you are watching for answers to prayer, and if you are ready to be thankful for answers to prayer, then you are on the road to praying well. You are going to enter into the adventure of evangelistic prayer. Take confidence in the fact that these are biblical prayers. God himself has revealed these to us as ways he desires us to pray. He will answer these prayers.

If you have difficulty seeing regular answers to these prayers, you need to ask the Lord to show you the reason. Good prayer requires the *mouth* to speak to God. But it also involves the *ear* in hearing what the Spirit is saying to us and the *eye* in watching for answers. While keeping your *mouth* open in intercession also keep

your *ears* open in listening to the Spirit and your *eyes* open in watching for answers.

Praying well is just the beginning of the adventure. We must do more than pray, but we cannot do more until we have prayed.

### **For Thought, Discussion, and Action**

- Begin praying these prayers from Colossians 4:2–6 during your devotional time.
- Share this passage with your Sunday school class, small group, prayer circle, prayer partner, etc. and begin praying this passage on a regular basis. Share the answers as you see them.
- Order *Developing a Prayer-Care-Share Lifestyle* or *Praying the Lord's Prayer for Neighbors* at [www.tonguetied.org](http://www.tonguetied.org).