

**LEADING A CHURCH TO BE EVANGELISTIC:
PRAYING EVANGELISTICALLY
By Chuck Lawless**

My seventh-grade classmate who first told me about Jesus was confrontational in his evangelistic approach. I successfully ignored his words, though, throughout seventh grade – and I assumed that I had “won” the battle when summer came at the end of the school year. If I did not see him each day, I would not be forced to think about the gospel.

What I did not realize, however, was that my young friend was praying for me. When school was out, he prayed more passionately than ever that I would be saved. I learned then that prayer *really matters* in evangelism, as God made me His child toward the end of that summer.

Regrettably, most churches pray far too little about evangelism. Somehow, we think we can reach non-believers in our own power, failing to realize that non-believers are held captive by a supernatural enemy (2 Cor. 4:3-4). If you want your church to be evangelistic, here is a simple plan to bathe the process in prayer.

Teach your congregation about the state of non-believers.

The Bible is clear about non-believers. They are blinded (2 Cor. 4:3-4), held in darkness (Col. 1:13), in the devil’s kingdom (Acts 26:18), condemned already (John 3:18), and dead in their trespasses (Eph. 2:1). Nothing short of the divine intervention of God can change this state. Teach your church about these difficult truths, and they will realize the necessity of prayer on behalf of non-believers. God alone can change the heart.

Establish prayer partners who will pray for each other to be evangelistic.

The apostle Paul knew that he, too, needed prayer to be evangelistic (see Eph. 6:19-20 and Col. 4:2-4). He longed for fellow believers to pray that he would obediently, courageously, and clearly speak the gospel every time a door was open for him to evangelize. If Paul needed that kind of prayer support, how much more do you and I? Enlist several teams of prayer partners, and challenge them to pray the Ephesians 6 and Colossians 4 texts for each other. Do not get concerned if only a few accept the challenge – a few genuine prayer warriors can make a significant difference.

Encourage each prayer team to pray for four non-believers by name.

Most believers at least know some non-believers, though our relationships with them may not be strong. Ask God to direct the attention of each prayer team to four non-believers in their lives – and then start praying for them by name. Pray with the compassion of Paul, whose heart’s longing was for Israel to be saved (Rom. 10:1). If you do not know how to pray, my friend Chris Schofield offers this model:

H – Pray for non-believers to have a receptive **heart** to the gospel.

E – Pray that their spiritual **eyes** will be opened.

A – Pray that they will have God’s **attitude** toward sin.

R – Pray that they will be **released** to believe.

T – Pray that their lives will be **transformed**.

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Pray specifically for “people groups” in your community.

The opportunities and prospects are almost endless. Begin by praying that local government officials will follow Christ. Then, pray for the schoolteachers in your community (focusing on those who teach your children). Add others to the list – firefighters, police officers, mail carriers, business leaders, store clerks, school bus drivers, and military personnel. Pray for their salvation, perhaps using the same prayer paradigm listed above. Developing a strategic annual prayer plan will help your church to stay focused on the task while also assuring that you will pray for most groups during that year.

Conduct prayer surveys of the community.

A prayer survey is a generally non-threatening means to “care and share” with neighbors. Contact the neighbor, and simply state, “Our church is praying for our community today. Is there any way that I might pray for you?” Learn the person’s name, write down the prayer request, *and be certain to pray as you committed to do*. Somewhere in the midst of these activities, it is quite likely that church members will meet someone who has not yet followed Christ. If so, begin to pray for that person’s salvation even while you pray about his/her stated requests. Be sure to follow up, always being alert for an opportunity to share Christ.

Tie prayer to baptism.

If your church practices believer’s baptism after a non-believer follows Christ, do not forget to recognize those who have been praying for that non-believer. Invite them to stand just prior to the baptism, thereby showing the church just how important prayer is in the process of evangelism. You might even ask who has been praying the longest for the new convert. When church members learn that persistent prayer really does make a difference in evangelism, they will be much more inclined to pray. Only God knows how He might graciously respond to that kind of evangelistic praying.