

WHY PRAY FIRST?

the **big** idea

Prayer to God makes sharing about God effective.

ice breaker

Are you inclined to pray for people who God has put in your life before you talk to them about faith matters? Why or why not?

related Scripture

“No one can come to me [Jesus] unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me.” John 6:44-45 (NIV)

challenging wisdom

Sometimes we think that if we know just the right words [to say] the person will believe.... The Bible awakens us to a reality that we sometimes forget.... Satan is alive and well.... We forget our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, the principalities of darkness in the heavenly realms. There is no issue or area in your life where you are most in the fray against forces you can't see than when you are doing evangelism.... Unless we engage our witness [about Jesus] with spiritual weapons, we are doomed to fail.

– Lon Allison

PRAYER DEMONSTRATES OUR DEPENDENCE ON GOD

In his book *Why Pray?*, international ministry leader John DeVries tells a story about his six-year-old grandson Andrew visiting his other grandparents, Nanna and Poppa Dykstra, in Nova Scotia. Andrew spent a week “helping” Poppa on the dairy farm, riding on the tractor in Poppa’s lap. DeVries reflects on the memory:

Since then I have often thought of little Andrew on Poppa’s lap as they lumbered off on the tractor to do some field work. This image strikes me as a picture of myself in prayer.

Prayer is the dependent relationship in which I sit on the lap of my heavenly Father and put my hand on his as he steers the tractor. After all, he not only owns and drives the tractor, but he owns the farm! . . . The fields that are ripe for harvest are God’s. He owns the tractor, and he knows where to plow. Only when we, like little children, climb into God’s lap in prayer, feel his arms of love around us,

and experience the security of having our hands on his while he guides the steering wheel—only then will missions move!¹

1 DISCUSS :: Why do you think we commonly forget to pray before talking with someone about God?

We can often have an inflated view of our role in the process of someone coming to know Jesus. But the truth is that only God can do the saving. Jesus helps calibrate our perspective in John 6:

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me.” John 6:44-45 (NIV)

As a result, we are faced with the humbling reality that we cannot save anyone. We cannot convict or convince anyone. This is not our role, as Jesus reveals:

“And when [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God’s righteousness, and of the coming judgment. . . . When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.” John 16:8, 13 (NLT)

Our job is to pray. God invites us to participate with him in his redemptive activity in the world through prayer. It has been said that “when people work, people work; when people pray, God works.”

2 DISCUSS :: What has been your perspective on the role of prayer in sharing your faith? How have you lived out your perspective in real life?

We must also depend on God because our own strength is insufficient to combat our adversary. We cannot forget that we have an adversary in this spiritual battle for the hearts, minds, and souls of our friends and neighbors. Yet, God invites us into his arms in prayer. God is the source of all the power needed and he alone can defeat our enemy and rescue a human heart. As Scottish minister and teacher Oswald Chambers wrote, “The prayer of the feeblest saint who lives in the Spirit and keeps right with God is a terror to Satan. The very powers of darkness are paralyzed by prayer. . . . No wonder Satan tries to keep our minds fussy in active work till we cannot think in prayer.” We cannot fight our adversary with our own strength. We need the weapon of prayer.

For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. . . . Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.
Ephesians 6:12, 18 (NLT)

3 DISCUSS :: What evidence have you seen of a spiritual adversary who opposes efforts to talk with people about God?

PRAYER SOFTENS HARD HEARTS

In the early 1980s, Lon Allison, pastor, speaker, and teacher of evangelism, planted his first church in a movie theater in California. This was not just any movie theater, but an X-rated movie theater. On the first Sunday, the theater marquee read: “Now Showing—God XXX.” People came. God miraculously changed lives there. In the mid ’80s, God led Lon to start another church nearby but in a different socioeconomic community. There wasn’t an X-rated movie theater in that community, but there was a movie theater, so they rented it. By this time, Lon had a seminary degree and worked even harder to plan and prepare. Hardly anyone came.

During this disappointing time, while driving through the fertile agricultural region of the San Joaquin Valley, Lon was contemplating the ineffectiveness of his second church plant and lamenting to God over how hard it was to evangelize people in this second community. Then something remarkable happened.

God gave Lon a vision of a giant hand hovering above the fields, holding a huge, rock-hard clod of dirt. Lon understood from God that this impenetrable soil was the place into which they were trying to plant a new church. A hammer . . . a fist . . . nothing could break the dirt. As Lon was contemplating this metaphor, rain began to fall down upon it. The gentle pouring of continual rain started loosening up the unbreakable clod. Afterward, upon telling some close friends about this experience, one of them said with conviction, “The rain is prayer. The rain that breaks hardened hearts is the prayers of God’s people.”

4 DISCUSS :: Think of a person you know who seems unlikely to follow Christ. What is it about that person that seems resistant to God?

PRAYER DRAWS PEOPLE TO JESUS

Prayer is like the gentle pouring of rain that loosens up the hardness of the hearts of our coworkers, neighbors, friends, classmates, and family. Author and speaker Rick Richardson states it this way: “Before we can talk to people about God, we need to talk to God about people.”² By beginning our evangelism with prayer, we lead with dependence on God

and love for those we pray for. Evangelistic prayer gives the responsibility of “saving” to God. We submit to God’s plan for our seeking friends and agree to “show up,” willing to be used for God’s purpose in their lives.

John DeVries recounts a story from India about the power of prayer to draw people to Jesus:

In one tribal out-caste village, many families became Christians and they became concerned for the salvation of the high-caste Brahmins living on the other side of the river... and so the families began to pray.

Stephen was a wealthy Brahmin living on the other side of the river. His wife had been ill for twenty years. . . .

One evening Stephen’s wife told him she had heard there were many miracles happening in the village [across the river]. She suggested that he go and stand by the river, facing the hut of the untouchables, to pray to this “new” God for healing.

At first he objected . . . but she prevailed and he went, asking this unknown God to reveal himself by healing his wife. If that would happen, he said, they would serve him forever. He returned to his home, and to his amazement he found his wife totally healed. In great excitement they rushed over the bridge and did what no self-respecting Brahmins would ever do—they entered the home of the untouchables and demanded to know who this God was to whom they had prayed.

The untouchables told them about Jesus.³

Prayer is powerful because the God to whom we pray is all-powerful and lovingly draws people to Christ—even the most unlikely men and women. As Lon Allison says, “It is the prayers of God’s people that break down the strongholds that the enemy holds over the people in our lives who do not know God.”⁴ When we become aware of prayer’s evangelistic power, we are motivated to pray to the only one who can change a person’s condition—God.

5 DISCUSS :: For whom do you most long to come to know Jesus? Share their names with the group. How do you think prayer could soften their hearts and draw them to Jesus?

6 PRACTICE :: In pairs or triads, pray a simple prayer for someone you know. Feel free to use one of the following examples to get started. Fill in the blanks with the name of your friend.

- Lord, it seems like _____ is blind to your truth. If this is true, please pierce _____’s blindness with your light so that he/she sees who you are and welcomes you into his/her life. (2 Corinthians 4:4)
- Father, gently instruct _____ to recognize if he/she needs to turn from lies that hold him/her back from you. Help _____ to come to his/her senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken _____ captive to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:25-26)
- God, you alone judge our hearts. Help _____ turn his/her heart to you and believe in your Son. Convict and convince him/her, Holy Spirit, so _____ believes in Jesus wholeheartedly and experiences your acceptance. (John 3:18)
- O God, _____ seems to be walking on the wide road away from you. God, turn his/her heart and give him/her the courage to choose the narrow gate. (Matthew 7:13)
- Heavenly Father, it seems _____ is separated from Christ, excluded from relationship with you and your hope. Have mercy and soften _____’s heart to move toward you and to be included in Christ. (Ephesians 2:12)

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Discuss how this exercise gives you confidence that God will answer your prayers.

7 DISCUSS :: In your life, how has prayer, or the lack of it, had an effect on the fruitfulness of your efforts to introduce people to Jesus? From now on, what simple steps can you take to invite God’s activity into their lives?

PRACTICE ON YOUR OWN

For 10-15 minutes one day this week, “practice” praying for others to come to know Jesus. Start first with people you know well. Write their names down and pray for them. Then pray for people whom you come across in your daily activities, even if you don’t know them well yet.

Here are some ideas for those prayers:

- *God, give the grocery checker an extra boost of energy today and may he have the joy of knowing you.*
- *Father, give my neighbor your peace today; help her find you in her difficult situation.*
- *God, I pray that you will lighten the load of my coworker and that he will discover that you stand ready to carry his burdens.*
- *Lord, I pray that _____ will come to know you. Create a spiritual climate around her that will point her to you.*

GETTING THE BIG IDEA

We are dependent on God to work in people’s lives and prepare them to receive the gospel. Without his work, our efforts are fruitless.

RESOURCES TO CHECK OUT

- *Prayer, Does It Make Any Difference?* by Philip Yancey (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan)
- *Praying Effectively for the Lost* by Lee E. Thomas (John the Baptist Printing Ministry)
- *Reckless Abandon: A Modern-Day Gospel Pioneer’s Exploits Among the Most Difficult to Reach Peoples* by David Sitton (Ambassador International)
- *Why Pray?* by John DeVries (Mission India)

QPlace STORY

Pat and his wife were taking a special vacation, so they ordered a limousine ride to the airport. As Pat settled into the back seat, he noticed a *Biblical Archaeology* magazine tucked into the back pocket of the front seat. Out of curiosity, Pat asked the driver, “Are you a Christian?” A bit put off, the driver responded, “Why would you ask me a question like that?” Pat directed his attention to the magazine. The driver replied that he was simply interested in archeology and was, in fact, of Jewish heritage.

Pat viewed the moment as a divine appointment and entered into a spiritual discussion with the driver. Within the course of their conversation, Pat was able to naturally share the gospel. As they

arrived at the airport, Pat told the driver, Michael, that he believed God had plans for him, and that he would pray for him.

Pat did pray for Michael—for years.

Who would have suspected that seven years later Pat would once again settle into the back seat of a limousine and spot a *Biblical Archaeology* magazine inside? Before they had left the driveway, Pat asked the driver if his name was Michael. Surprised, the driver said, “Yes, how did you know that?” Pat reminded him of their encounter seven years earlier. And then Michael became excited. In those years, as Pat had been praying, God had worked in Michael’s life . . . and he was now a follower of Jesus!



Getting Ready: Noticing, Praying, Listening
Getting Started: Asking Questions, Loving, Welcoming
Keeping It Going: Facilitating, Serving Together, Sharing

These nine practices build a foundation for spiritual conversations to happen naturally, so you can talk about God with anyone. The 9 Arts Complete Guide has 36 interactive sessions for discussion and hands-on practice.

Practicing the 9 Arts of Spiritual Conversations: Complete Guide can be used:

1. By individuals who desire vibrant spiritual conversations with those around them
2. In a triad of facilitators getting ready to launch a Q Place
3. In a small group of Christians wanting to grow in these practices
4. In Sunday school classes and a variety of church-based discipleship groups



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Q Place empowers Christians to engage in meaningful conversations about God with people who believe differently.