

Prayerwalking



Taking Your Faith Into The Real World



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Praying For Pagans

The church finds itself in the midst of paganism. What is paganism? It is a non-religious, secular mindset. It is worshipping all kinds of idols while rejecting the true worship of God. It is the entertaining and accepting of a whole host philosophies along with the denial of Christianity. It is a lifestyle that is governed by fleshly wisdom and lust rather than God's eternal, unchanging Word. In order to reach pagan people, the church has to saturate them with prayer.

Acts 17:16-33 provides a helpful model to pray for pagans. In these verses, Paul ministers in the city of Athens. Athens was a pagan city given to idolatry and philosophy. These verses can give us insight on how to seek God for modern, pagan people:

Ask God to give you a burden for the lost around you (17:16). The Bible tells us that Paul was greatly distressed by the idolatry of Athens. His spirit was provoked by their spiritual condition. This distress

fueled his ministry to them. It's easy to get upset by the idolatry and rejection of

the gospel by a pagan culture. Yet, we need this kind of burden and compassion for people. Ask God to stir your heart in this same way.

Pray for the wisdom and boldness to proclaim the gospel in this pagan culture (17:17). Paul shared the gospel and reasoned with people concerning the gospel in the marketplace. The gospel must penetrate the marketplace. For this to happen, believers have to share their faith where they are. Ask your Father for the wisdom and the boldness to share the truth in the places where He has planted you.

Plead that people will be open and ready to hear the gospel (17:18-21). When Paul declared the truth about Jesus and His resurrection, people were interested. They were ready to hear more. It's interesting that many of these were philosophers - Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Epicurus taught that the purpose of life was pleasure and freedom from pain, passions, and fears. For the Epicurean, life was about the pursuit of pleasure above all else. On the other hand, Cypriot Zeno,

founder of Stoicism, stressed living in harmony with nature. He taught depending on reason and being self-sufficient. For the Stoic, life was about reason and self-sufficiency. Even though they had opposing philosophies, both were open to listen to the gospel. In our culture, there is a host of philosophies. Yet, we must pray that people will be open to the gospel and the claims of Jesus Christ.

Ask for strength to stand in the face of ridicule (17:18). While there were many who were open to hear more about the gospel, some called Paul a “babbling.” This was a derogatory term. It meant a scrap collector or a peddler of assorted ideas. We can expect the same treatment. The gospel is foolishness to pagans; it is seemingly beneath their intellectual sophistication. However, we must stand firm. Christianity can compete and win in the marketplace of idea. Believers must not cower down but be bold and faithful in proclaiming the truth of the good news about Jesus.

Pray that God would penetrate the darkness of peoples’ idolatry (17:22-24). Paul declares that they were given over fully to idolatry. Athens was full of temples to gods. Statues of gods and goddesses could also be found in public and commercial buildings. They worshiped every god you can imagine. Yet, they were ignorant of the true and living God. This is true of our present culture. Call on the Lord to break through this darkness with the gospel. Plead that the power of the Holy Spirit

will enlighten people to the truth of who God is and His good news through Christ our Lord.

Plead that people will see that there is one God and one Savior, Jesus Christ (17:23). The Greeks were exceedingly tolerant. They were fearful of offending any god or person. For this reason, they built an altar to an “unknown god.” They felt that this would cover any omission on their part. We might think that this is silly but we see it in our own culture. Our society is pluralistic – all religions and all “gods” are of equal value and importance. None should be exalted over any other. We must plead that people will come to see that Jesus Christ is the only way to God and to salvation. We must pray that God will break through this pluralistic mindset so that people might come to the truth of Christianity.

Plead that people will know that there is a personal God who has created them and sustains them (17:24-25). In the midst of this rampant idolatry, Paul declares that there is one true God. This one true God is the personal Creator. He made the world and everything in it, including every person. He gives to every person life, breath, and everything else that they need. We should pray that people would come to see that God is personal. He’s not some far off Deity. He’s not some arbitrary Being. He is the personal God who has created every person. He is actively at work in peoples’ lives. He sustains every person (17:28). Pray that peoples’ concept of God will be changed. Ask that they will

see Him for who He is – the personal, creating God who actively works in peoples' lives.

Pray that people will see God's "providential clues" (17:26). You may ask, "What do you mean by 'providential clues'?" Providence is God's unfolding of His plan. In His providence, God actively works in our world. These works of God are "clues" to point us to God. They are indications of His existence and greatness. He describes these in 17:27-28. He also mentioned others in Acts 14:17, "Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with good." God gives us these "clues" so that as Paul said, "that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (17:27). No one is saved by these providential clues. Yet, it points a person to the reality and existence of God. It can bring a person to openness concerning who God is and what He requires. Pray that people will see these and will begin to question and wonder about who God is and what He requires.

Ask that the strongholds in peoples' minds will be torn down (17:29). People have many different concepts of who God is. This hinders them from hearing and believing the truth about who God is and what he requires. Pray that these false ideas will be destroyed. Ask that they will be demolished so that there is room in their

minds for the truth about Jesus to be established and erected.

Pray that people will repent and trust solely in Jesus Christ (17:30). God commands people to repent. God demands that people turn from the idols and believe in Him.

Plead that people will understand who Jesus Christ is (17:31). Paul announces to the Athenians who Jesus is. He is the Man appointed by God. He is the Son of God. He is the Savior sent by God. He will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ. To prove all these things, God raised Him from the dead. Talk about the gospel in a verse! We must press these truths on the pagan culture in which we live. We must make known that Jesus Christ is the very Son of God sent by God to be the Savior from sin and damnation. We must declare that judgment is coming and that Jesus Christ will judge in righteousness. At the same time, we must pray that people will understand these truths and embrace them with their whole being. Pray that people will come to know Christ as He is and that they will embrace Him as their Savior and bow to Him as their Lord.

Pray that God will protect your heart from discouragement (17:32-33). In these verses, Paul reveals that people had three responses to Paul's presentation of the gospel. Some rejected the message, "some mocked" (17:32). Others wanted to hear more, "We will hear you again on this matter" (17:32). However, some heard

and believed, “some men joined him and believed” (17:33). We still see these same responses today – rejection, openness, and acceptance. It’s easy to get discouraged when sharing the gospel in this culture. Yet, God can and will give us the strength to persevere. He will enable us to continue faithful in praying and sharing the gospel. If we will keep being faithful and not give up, we will reap (Galatians 6:9). Ask for God’s help to stay faithful and not give way to discouragement.

Plead with God to have mercy on those who do not receive the gospel (17:32). As I read this text, my heart rejoiced over those who received the gospel. At the same time, it broke my heart to read that some sneered and ridiculed the gospel. It also grieved me that some wanted to hear more. When a person hears the gospel, they need to respond to the gospel. While it is heartbreaking that people do not immediately respond to the gospel, it doesn’t mean that we give up hope. We continue to pray. We continue to share. We continue to love. Ask God to have mercy on those who ridicule the gospel. Pray that He will do a gracious work in their hearts and bring them to faith and repentance. Pray also that those who delay faith. Ask that God would be merciful to them, drawing them to Christ in a true, and living faith.

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