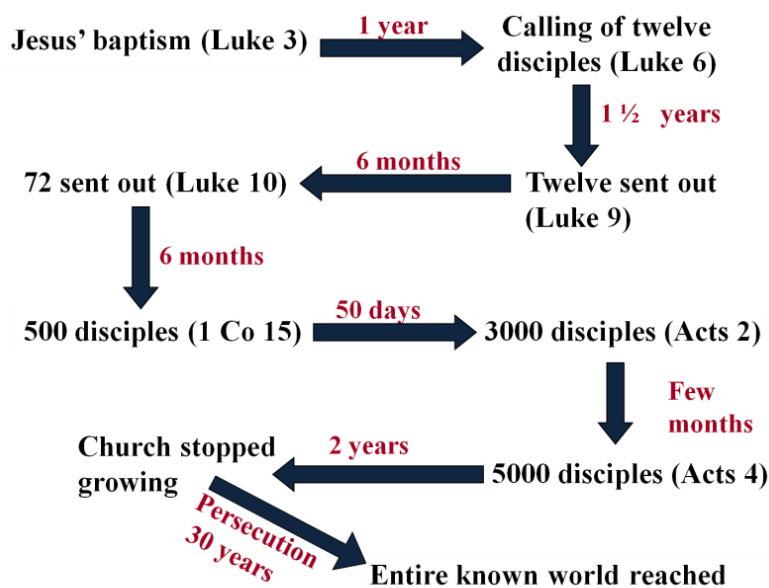




In our society, most people who know anything about Jesus like him. I mean it's hard *not* to like him, right? I have had people tell me that they love Jesus but hate Paul. That's a different question for a different day, but *why* do people like Jesus? What if I asked the question another way? What does it mean to be Christ-like? I think all Christians would agree that we are to be like Jesus, but what does that mean? I asked someone this question just a few days ago and I got the very typical answer. He said that Christ-likeness is a matter of growing in holiness. Jesus was perfect and never sinner and God wants us to be holy, so we must grow in personal holiness. Holiness would include other character qualities like love and gentleness.

Every time I have ever asked this question, I have always received pretty much the same answer. Everyone answers the question in terms of Jesus character. And this makes sense since his character stands head and shoulders above anyone who has ever walked the earth. This is not a wrong answer but in all the times I have asked, I have never had anyone give the complete answer. Would you like to know the right and complete answer of what it means to be like Christ? To be like Christ is to follow his character *and* his priorities. It's not enough to be holy and loving. Make no mistake--these are essential character qualities. But Jesus' character in no

way adequately describes Jesus. To be like Christ is to follow his character *and* his priorities.



But that raises a key question, doesn't it? What were his priorities? Let's look to Jesus' own words for the answer. After the story of Zaccheus's conversion, Jesus made this powerful statement. *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost* (Luke 17:10). There is the priority of Christ in one simple statement--to seek and to save the lost. Now just because it was Jesus' priority, does that mean it should be our

priority as well? After all, Jesus spent a lot of time healing sick and demon possessed people, but I would never argue that healing others should be our top priority in life.

So how do we know that Jesus' priority--to seek and to save the lost--should also be our priority? We know this is true because his priority was woven into everything Jesus did and everything Jesus taught his disciples to do. Here you can see the strategy of Jesus. He ministered to the crowds but he spent most of his time developing the leaders.

Not only that, but the apostles followed the strategy of Jesus. In so doing, they were able to reach the entire Roman world in about 30 years. Therefore, Jesus strategy was not just for Jesus. We are to follow Jesus' character but also his priorities. You can break his strategy into two parts--discipleship and evangelism. I have a friend who has been training local churches in the process of discipleship for the past 30 years. I have often heard him say, "discipleship without evangelism is not worthy of the name." Most of what a local church does can be put under the category of some form of discipleship. So much of it is worthwhile and Biblical. It's good stuff. We learn and grow in many ways.

But my friend is saying that if you do discipleship in the absence of evangelism, then you are not really doing discipleship. It just so happens that my friend agrees with Jesus. If you have Jesus' character without his priorities, then you are not very Christ-like. Put another way, if you are a believer who has steadily grown in holiness over the years but you almost never share your faith, then you look very little like Jesus. That might just sting a little bit, but that's OK. Don't beat yourself up over, just decide to do something about it.

That's what our study in Romans chapter ten is about--proclaiming Christ. Making Christ known to our families, our neighbors and the nations so they can call on his name and be saved. Verse 13 makes it plain and simple. *For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* The gospel really is that simple, isn't it? But in order to call on the name of Christ, first his name must be proclaimed to others. God has tasked us with the immense privilege to do just that.

But it doesn't always feel like a privilege, does it? Sometimes it feels like a burden. Sometimes it feels like pure obligation. We know that we should tell others about Christ and we know that we should want to tell others about Christ, but we don't. We don't do it and we don't want to do it. So here's what happens. We wait until the pastor preaches an occasional message about sharing our faith. We leave feeling guilt and shame. We offer a little prayer to God for help and we gather up all of the courage we can muster and we timidly share a little with someone at work or a family member who doesn't know the Lord. "Whew! I'm so glad that's over." The guilt and the shame subside to an acceptable level and we go on with our lives the way they were until the next time the pastor preaches on evangelism and the entire vicious process starts all over again.

Right? Doesn't this seem to describe what evangelism is typically like in the church? Nobody wants that. Believe me, I don't want that. We do want Holy Spirit conviction that will move us to action. We do want Holy Spirit power that will give us the courage to speak up and proclaim Christ. But none of us wants a cycle of guilt/action/relief, guilt/action/relief. So my prayer is that these few messages on proclaiming Christ would cause a simmering in your heart and mind which will begin to change you from the inside out.

Speaking of prayer, that is the first point in our outline.

1. Proclaim on your knees.

Paul began chapter ten with prayer at the forefront. *Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.* If this was the only thing that Paul had said about prayer, we might think it was just polite talk. We do this all of the time, don't we. Someone tells us about a trial they are experiencing and what do we say to them? If you're a guy you say, "Hey brother, I'll pray for ya." You have to get the "ya" in there. Got to be casual and guy-like. But the women say it something like this. "Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that. That must be so hard. I will definitely pray for you and your family." We make promises to pray for others and have varying levels of success and commitment to those promises for prayer.

So is this what Paul was doing? Was he offering his obligatory prayer promise? Hardly, especially when you add it to what he wrote in chapter nine.

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh (Romans 9:1-3).

This is a shocking statement. Paul was so burdened by the lost state of his fellow Jews that he was willing to be *accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers*. What he seems to be saying is that he was willing to suffer an eternity in hell so that his fellow Israelites might be saved. Do we take this incredible statement at face value? Would he actually have condemned himself to hell for the sake of the unsaved Jews? Would you do the same? I am quite sure I could never make such a statement. I might be willing to die to save someone's life or even lose my life to save someone's soul, if that were possible, but I am quite sure that I would not forfeit my soul to save another soul. So how could Paul say such a thing?

For one thing, he was almost certainly following in Moses' footsteps. Listen to what Moses said to the Lord after the shameful incident with the golden calf.

31 So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. 32 But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written" (Exodus 32:31-32).

It sounds like Moses and Paul were saying the same thing, doesn't it? Let's think this through for a moment. If Paul was willing to be "accursed and cut off from Christ" for his brothers, this would function as a sort of substitutionary atonement. Paul would be giving himself as a substitute for the Jews. He would be dying in their place--giving not just his life, but his soul in exchange for their souls. This would make him like a savior, but in this case, Paul would be going even further than Jesus did. Jesus gave his life as a substitute sacrifice but he did not exchange his eternal relationship with the Father.

Therefore, if you carried Paul's statement to its absolute literal sense, he would be offering himself a substitute savior for his fellow Jews. But wouldn't this be a blasphemous statement because in effect he would be saying that Jesus' death and resurrection were not enough. Not

only did Jesus give his life on their behalf, but Paul would take it a step further and exchange his very soul for them.

Surely this is not what Paul meant. I think the best way to understand this radical verse is to take it as a statement of hyperbole. Paul would not exchange his soul for the souls of others because he knew full well that this was not even possible. It was simply something that could not be done. However, do not miss the fact that this is the way Paul felt. His burden for his people was so great, so overwhelming in his heart and mind, that he *felt* as if he would exchange his soul for theirs.

So when you come upon Romans 10:1, *Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved*, you absolutely must read Romans 9:3 into it. *For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers*. These two verses are inseparable. After all, they are not only in the same book, but they are only separated by a couple dozen of what we call verses. Chapter ten is about praying for his people and chapter nine tells us the depth and passion of his prayers. Romans 9 described his "heart's desire in chapter ten.

2. Proclaim out of your heart's desire

This is where all evangelism starts. This is where all proclamation must begin: on our knees and in our hearts. Paul did not give his soul for the sake of the gospel but he did give his life. Now am I saying that you must give your life to save the unsaved neighbor across the street? Realistically, no. You're probably not going to feel the same way about your neighbor as you might a close relative, but the point is that you feel something. Do you, like Paul, desire them to be saved? Do you care that the people around you are lost and perishing? This is where proclamation must begin.

Paul prayed other similar prayers for the lost. As a prisoner of Rome and standing before King Agrippa, *Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."* (Acts 26:29)

More than, we are urged to pray for the salvation of all people, starting with, but not limited to kings and others in authority.

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:1-4

I admit, it feels useless to pray for our president and leaders. There just are not very many examples of such people getting saved. And think about this command to pray spoken to believers around the world. For the small minority of believers in North Korea, they are commanded to pray for the salvation of Kim Jong Il. Christians in Somalia are to pray for president Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. You don't hear much in the news about Somalia but it is one of the top five most corrupt governments in the world. If you are a Christian living in Afghanistan, you have a Biblical obligation to pray for president Hamid Karzai. Despite all of our assistance, the government in Afghanistan is as bad as they come.

How likely is it that any of these men will repent of their sins and place their faith in Christ? It seems nigh impossible that it could ever happen, doesn't it? It's not common but it does happen. Probably the single greatest example in Scripture is the conversion of King Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was a brutal dictator who attained the title of most powerful man in the world in his day. He did whatever he wanted to whomever he wanted. he was seemingly unstoppable until he ran head first into the sovereign power of God. God humbled him for seven years and he came out the other end a changed man. His declaration of trust in the Lord ranks up with any Psalm or prophetic word you could find.

34At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever,
for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
35all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
and he does according to his will among the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth;
and none can stay his hand
or say to him, "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:34-35)

And who do you think was praying for King Nebuchadnezzar for all of those years? The faithful servant Daniel daily prayed for his king to come to faith in the Lord.

Nineveh is a city with an amazing history. They experienced a small revival under Nebuchadnezzar's repentance. The preaching of Jonah led to a large scale repentance. By the 2nd century AD, Nineveh has active, growing churches which continued for the next 19 centuries. But just last month, the radical Muslims in Mosul (which is just across the river from the ruins of Nineveh) drove out every last Christian from the city under threat of certain death. What a huge and sad change.

I recently started reading the classic book on prayer called *The Power of Prayer* written by R.A. Torrey, pastor of Chicago's Moody Church in the early 1900's, Early on I got stuck and intrigued by the following quote. "Prayer can do anything that God can do, and as God can do anything, prayer is omnipotent."¹ That's quite a sentence, isn't it? This may well be the most audacious claim about prayer I have ever read. Let's break this down into three phrases.

1. Prayer can do anything God can do.
2. God can do anything.
3. Prayer is omnipotent.

Out of the three, I can definitely agree that number 2 is absolutely correct. God is omnipotent and as even Nebuchadnezzar testified, "He does according to his will among the host of heaven...and none can stay his hand." But is #1 correct? At first I was hesitant to say yes. It sounds presumptuous and almost blasphemous. It sounds like God is a puppet in my hand that I can manipulate through prayer. What makes this even worse is that some Christians hold to a view of God and prayer where the person who is praying is essentially in control. But then, with

apologies to Mr. Torrey, I decided to add a caveat. Prayer, *according to the will of God*, can do anything God can do. If God wills it, he can do it.

This fits perfectly with what we studied in Romans 8. *And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.* Sometimes we know what to pray. Sometimes we think we know what to pray and the Spirit "corrects" us, if you will and other times we don't have the slightest idea what to pray and the Spirit intercedes for us "according to the will of God." With that addition, then I can agree that prayer is omnipotent. How might this idea affect your prayers for the lost and your prayers in general?

A lot more could be said on the topic of prayer but Paul's focus was on praying for their salvation. There are several things we can take from this.

- He believes that God acts in response to our prayers.
- He believes that God acts in response to our prayers for the salvation of others.
- He believes that God acts in response to our prayers for the salvation of others even though Paul had established that God is sovereign over salvation.
- He feels his love for the unbelieving Jews to the deepest part of his being.

Some people get tripped up with the part about prayer in relation to God's sovereignty. Some people think that if God is sovereign over salvation, then why should we pray? Some would take it so far as to say, then why should we even witness if God is sovereign and will do whatever he wills? I am sure this has occurred to most of you before and some have been quite troubled by it. Let me do my best to answer this objection.

First, I would ask what you do with God's sovereignty over every other area of life. If God is sovereign over your life, then why should you ever pray about anything at all? If God's will cannot be thwarted, then why should we ever ask God to do anything? If you are going to use this excuse in the arena of salvation and sovereignty then you need to be consistent and never pray about anything ever again. But I don't think you are willing to do that because you pray for the salvation of people.

J.I Packer has an insightful explanation of this issue.

There is a second way in which you acknowledge that God is sovereign in salvation. You pray for the conversion of others. In what terms, now, do you intercede for them? Do you limit yourself to asking that God will bring them to a point where they can save themselves, independently of Him? I do not think you do. I think that what you do is to pray in categorical terms that God will, quite simply and decisively, save them: that He will open the eyes of their understanding, soften their hard hearts, renew their natures, and move their wills to receive the Savior. You ask God to work in them everything necessary for their salvation. You would not dream of making it a point in your prayer that you are not asking God actually to bring them to faith, because you recognize that that is something He cannot do. Nothing of the sort! When you pray for unconverted people, you do so on the assumption that it is in God's power to bring them to faith. You entreat Him to do that very thing, and your confidence in asking rests upon the certainty that He is able

to do what you ask. And so indeed He is: this conviction, which animates your intercessions, is God's own truth, written on your heart by the Holy Spirit.

In prayer, then (and the Christian is at his sanest and wisest when he prays), you know that it is God who saves men; you know that what makes men turn to God is God's own gracious work of drawing them to Himself, and the content of your prayers is determined by this knowledge. Thus, by your practice of intercession, no less than by giving thanks for your conversion, you acknowledge and confess the sovereignty of God's grace. And so do all Christian people everywhere.²

Let's make this personal. Why are you here? I don't mean why you are at Grace Church, though I'm glad you are here, but why are you in a church at all? Why are you not in a synagogue in Chicago? Why are you not in a mosque in Mosul, where they recently ordered every last Christian out of the city? Why are you not a Buddhist in a mountain village in China? Why are a believer in rural Wisconsin instead of an agnostic or religious unbeliever? Two reasons--the sovereign hand of God and the faithful prayers and ministry of people who cared about you.

I wish all of you could have been at the baptism service two weeks ago. If you missed it, you really missed out. We heard what we always hear--the testimonies of those who were saved by God. And how did they arrive at a point of faith? the same way you and I did--by God's grace and through those who cared enough to share the truth with us.

I want to challenge you to take up 7 days of proclamation. I am asking you to pray for a lost person every day for seven days, even if it only takes a minute or two. And as you pray, ask the Lord to begin to change your heart so that you increasingly desire pray and ministry to the lost.

Rich Maurer
August 17, 2014

¹ R.A. Torrey, *The Power of Prayer and the Prayer of Power*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, © 1924, p. 17.

² J.I. Packer, [Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility](#): How Both Biblical truths Coexist in God's Grace, © 1961 by J.I Packer, p. 5-6. (Taken from *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* by J.I Packer).