

8 HABITS OF EVANGELISM



Worship • Generosity • Justice
Radical Welcome • Sacraments
Teaching • Prayer • Fellowship

8 HABITS OF EVANGELISM



**Office of Theology, Formation & Evangelism
Presbyterian Mission Agency**



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission



Copyright © 2021 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

All Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible,
copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education
of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

Permission is granted to churches to reprint this resource for study and worship.
The content is not to be revised, adapted and/or incorporated into other materials
without the express written permission of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

pcusa.org/evangelism

4

PRAYER

Tom Bagley



I. OPENING PRAYER

*To you, Lord Jesus,
I bow my head and all my thinking;
I bow my will and all my choosing;
I bow my heart and all my loving;
That I may be attentive to your Word
And live a faithful life.
Amen.¹*

II. THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER

Prayer as a Means of Evangelism

Of all the activities we associate with spirituality, prayer is probably the most common. A recent report by the Barna Research organization noted that in the United States, 69% of people practice prayer weekly.² It is a near universal spiritual activity found in every culture, among every ethnicity, and from the earliest of times.

But in the lives of early followers of Jesus, there was something so uncommon and

attractive about the way they prayed, that it literally drew people to them.

What were the unique elements of early Christian prayer? And what sets Christian prayer apart even today?

First, early believers prayed in a personal way, as if God were close to them, delighted in them, and concerned about their every need. Jesus modeled this way of prayer by addressing God as “Abba, Father” in the Garden of Gethsemane (*Mark 14:36*), and followers adopted his familial way.

Second, early Christians prayed for wholeness in every aspect of life, from the most basic needs of food and health (*Matthew 6:11*), to release from addiction (*Mark 5:1-20*), and protection from systemic oppression (*Acts 4:23-30*). This was only natural, since prayer and healing were broad and constant activities in the ministry of Jesus. His prayers encompassed every joy and every need.

Third, first century followers prayed with confidence in God—boldness even—believing that God heard their prayers and

answered them. Jesus had taught them, “Ask and you will receive . . .” (*Matthew 7:7*). So, Christians dared to persist in prayer, confident that God would provide what was needed. As historian Alan Kreider writes:

Indeed, it was the early Christians’ practice of prayer that empowered them and gave them buoyancy. Because they believed that God answers prayers, they could take risks, live lives that were eventful and imprudent, and be faithful . . . [even when it got] them into hot water . . . [When] . . . outsiders got a whiff of it, they wanted in.³

III. SCRIPTURAL REFERENCE

Prayer in the Life of Peter and Early Believers

Acts 3:1–10

Jesus had a particular concern for those who were sick; he understood and had compassion for all manner of illness, suffering and sin. When Jesus prayed, he didn’t simply address the issue of physical illness; he restored health to every aspect of life. This same way of praying also characterized prayers of Peter and the early believers.

Notice that the beggar had been crippled from birth and was sitting *at* the entrance of Beautiful gate, but not *inside* of it. Because of his physical infirmity this lame man was thought to have sinned and was, thus, excluded from worship among the people of God. But when God healed through Peter’s prayer, God restored—not only the physical ability to walk—but also the social and religious ability to belong to the worshiping community.

Peter prayed an open-eyed prayer, brimming with confidence in God’s power, spoken spontaneously; it was a command to the infirmity itself. (In ancient times, people believed

illnesses were caused by unseen spiritual forces. They thought of healing as gaining victory over these forces through Jesus’ name. While this idea may seem strange to us, we should remember that medical science has long assumed that many human maladies result from psychosomatic sources.) When Peter prayed in Jesus’ name for this man to walk, he demonstrated the confidence we, too, can have that God will heal many aspects of our lives through prayer.

Acts 4:18–31

After Peter healed the man at the Beautiful Gate, he was arrested, then later, released by leaders of the city. Reporting to fellow believers all that happened, the church wasted no time in turning to prayer.

Why did they pray? Certainly, they were grateful for Peter’s release from jail, but also, they felt the fear of threats against them and knew they needed God’s help. Having acted with courage once, now they needed courage again. Courage filled them as they called on God in prayer.

This bold way of praying astonished their enemies and attracted friends. Crowds gathered, and the good news of Jesus spread.

Acts 12:1–19

Fast-forward, now, some time ahead. Full-scale violence had broken out against the followers of Jesus, and once again, Peter found himself imprisoned.

But Peter and other believers were committed to prayer:

So, Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

(Acts 12:5, NIV)

The original Greek word for the phrase, “earnestly praying,” indicates their prayer

was a fervent, continuous effort, like the effort of a football lineman who will not be pushed backward but continues straining step-by-step ahead. The church had learned to pray earnestly because the church had seen God's tangible help. Although believers feared, they overcame fear through prayer.

Notice that it was shared prayer the Christians prayed. In shared prayer, faith is multiplied, concerns are widened, and believers gain strength to persevere. The church on its knees prayed late into the night and amazing things happened.

IV. ILLUSTRATION

Distinctive Prayer Draws People to Christ Today

Dave Culbertson grew up in a family that went to church on special occasions—"holiday Christians," as he called them. His mother was a believer, but except for a time in high school when Dave attended with friends, church and faith had no significance for him. Now, in his mid-30s and married, Dave had been away from church for 20 years.

Hamilton Mill Presbyterian Church (HMPC) was a new congregation in the Atlanta suburbs, and friends invited Dave and his wife, Cheryl, to attend. While Dave had little interest, Cheryl went on her own, seeking answers for their struggle with infertility; they longed for a child. In seeking help, Cheryl joined an Alpha Course, an introduction to Christianity, offered by the church.

Week after week, Cheryl attended Alpha, hoping for answers from God, struggling with a growing doubt about God's love for her and feeling bitter about their inability to conceive a child. Dave says, "She hadn't seen or felt what she needed from it. She was

bitter, angry, dejected, hurting—and had given up on Alpha or God or anything else helping her."

One night at Alpha, the topic was healing and prayer. At the end of the meeting, the group prayed for anyone who asked. The group prayed for Cheryl, gathering around her and laying on hands.

"She came home," Dave says, "sat down with me and told me . . . [the group] had prayed fervently for her, for our infertility and laid hands on her—and she said that it filled her with the Spirit."

Dave was astonished: "What I witnessed was like nothing I'd seen before. She left [home that night] this bitter and broken soul, whom I loved and was helpless to help. . . . She came home transformed and with a renewed hope and a new outlook. I swear it was like her heart had been swapped."

Cheryl didn't necessarily believe that she would get pregnant, but now, she was at peace with whatever the outcome.

This experience of believers practicing shared prayer changed Dave as well. "I had never actually witnessed transformation, but Cheryl was spiritually changed after that. From that experience, we both got involved in HMPC, went through Confirmation and were baptized. And then, with faith and much more prayer (and even more dark days) came Wesley [our son]!"

V. HABITS FOR PRAYER

Living the distinctive lifestyle of Jesus is not easy; it can only be accomplished in dependence upon God and in relationship with a community of others. Prayer is one of the marks of this distinctive way of life, but it is also more than that: Prayer is our means of engaging God. It is the fuel that empowers

a lifestyle that proclaims good news and attracts attention. Within this perspective, there are at least five prayer habits that we may strive to develop.



A routine of personal encounter with God through prayer. (Daily)

Jesus prayed with his disciples, but he also spent time alone with God in prayer. This time is vital and basic. It is our personal connection with God that transforms and empowers us to live Jesus' way of life. During this time, it is especially important to be honest about what we deeply think and feel—and to be silent, listening for the Holy Spirit within. The more we disclose of ourselves, the more we experience the tender, gracious, loving presence of God.

Choose a place and time to meet God regularly. Write, draw or think about your life. Talk to God about what comes up. Be honest. Read Scripture. Observe nature and art. Be silent and listen inwardly. Commit to act on what you experience in your time of prayer.



A regular practice of praying with others. (Weekly or biweekly)

When we pray with others it strengthens our faith, widens our horizons and builds confidence in God. Find a prayer partner or gather a few friends at your home. Humbly join in prayer with friends on the margins; plan regular times of prayer with those who are homeless, in jail or in nursing homes. Hold prayer gatherings for racial justice. Hold times of prayer before community events, before government or school board meetings or at protests. Listen as others pray and add your voice to their prayers.



A regular practice of expecting, identifying and naming answers to prayer. (Whenever you pray)

So often when we pray, we forget to look for answers. This practice invites us to look expectantly at events in our lives as answers for what God may be doing. Often events will surprise us, sometimes they will block us and at other times, they will cause us to wait and to pray more. But we will miss God's answers to our prayers unless we look for them intentionally in our daily lives. Keeping a journal or a spiritual diary is useful for this as is a group practice of inviting members to identify and celebrate answers to prayer.



A routine of “Prayer Walking” in your neighborhood, place of work or community, looking for the activity of God. (Once or twice a week)

God is at work in all people, all places and all times; this is a way to look for God and join in whatever God is doing. Wherever we find people curious about spiritual matters, standing with the poor or working for mercy and justice, wherever we find forgiveness, healing or reconciliation or wherever there is new life blossoming in spite of hardship, loss and difficulty, God is at work. We look and listen carefully to our neighbors, co-workers, friends and community. When we begin to see where God is working and what God is doing, that is our invitation to join God in life-changing ministry.



A regular practice of praying in person with neighbors, co-workers, family and friends. (Whenever someone expresses a deep-felt concern, joy, or need)

Many people struggle to express deep thoughts and feelings to God, so when you offer to express this for them in prayer, you offer a true gift and blessing. Listen carefully to what people say, and especially to how they are feeling. Bow your head. If appropriate, hold their hand. Verbally, speak to God in your own words to express the thoughts and feelings of your friend(s). Be silent for a moment and listen inwardly for God. Then verbally ask God for help, guidance, strength or healing. Give thanks for God's goodness and blessing.

Remember to come back to your friend(s) and check in with their expressed joy, need or concern. When you see clear answers, point them out to your friend(s). Both your faith and theirs will grow.

VI. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your response to the idea that a distinctive practice of prayer may, in fact, draw non-churchgoers to the good news? When have you seen Christian prayer impact non-church friends?
2. How do habits like the ones suggested contribute to a distinctively Christian lifestyle? Why are habits more powerful for

evangelism than spontaneous, occasional practices?

3. Research indicates that on average it takes two months or more to develop a new habit. What will you and your fellow believers need to do to develop new habits around prayer?
4. Why is it important to have both personal and corporate prayer habits?
5. Of the five prayer habits suggested, which do feel most called to develop now? What specific actions will you take to accomplish your goal?

VII. CLOSING PRAYER

O God . . . my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

(Psalm 63:1)

O God, my God, I long to live my life in such a way that others may be drawn to you, and yet I struggle with the ongoing commitment to do it. Open my eyes to the needs of my neighbors, co-workers, family and friends. Help me experience the gentle touch of compassion for them and a fire of inward conviction for you that I might seek to live in order to be noticed. Draw me ever deeper into your purposes for my life and help me pursue you with all my heart, mind, soul and strength. Grant me your Holy Spirit that I may live faithfully, pointing others to the hope I find in you; in the name of the One who taught us how to live and pray, Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

NOTES 1. Adapted from Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *The Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 20.
 2. Barna, "Signs of Decline and Hope Among Key Metrics of Faith," *Articles State of the Church 2020*, March 4, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church>.
 3. Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2016), p. 211.

8 Habits of Evangelism

Theology, Formation & Evangelism
Presbyterian Mission Agency
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, KY 40202
pcusa.org/evangelism



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission



PDS 23308-21-001