

Evangelistic Prayer: Praying for unbelievers

Is it possible to pray someone into the Kingdom?

On the basis of John 14:14 *“You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it”*, and 1 John 5:14-15 *“if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And ... we know that we have what we asked of him”* it appears that we ought to be able to pray effectively for the conversion of others. The Bible contains the principles by which God works, and cannot be constructed into a formula to manipulate God or the person we are praying for! We also need to remember that results may not be instant: we may have to wait years.

Step 1:

To pray “according to God’s will” we must believe that God wants to save the person we are praying for. Without this assurance we can have no authority in our praying.

Ezek. 18:23 and 32: after writing chapters on the dreadful judgement and destruction coming on God’s people we find Ezekiel proclaiming “I take no pleasure in the death of anyone” twice in the same chapter. Despite what the people are bringing upon themselves by their sin, even under the Old Covenant, God’s heart is to save them. How much more must that be true in the era of the New Covenant?

John 3:16-17 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes on him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

1 Tim 2:4 God “wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.”

2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

Step 2:

We need to begin to proclaim the above scriptures, both to God and ourselves, that it is indeed his will to save the one(s) we are praying for. We can then move on to thank God for that person and his desire to save them. We can claim his love for them, and the sufficiency of the cross for their salvation, based on:

Romans 5:6 and 8 “when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly...While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” It is a useful reminder to ourselves that Jesus did not die for us because we are Christians, but he died to enable us to become Christians. Therefore we can claim that on behalf of the as yet unconverted!

1 John 2:2 Jesus died “not only for ours sins, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

Step 3:

As we proclaim that Jesus has shed his blood, died, risen and ascended to obtain the salvation of the person we are praying for, we begin to engage in spiritual warfare. We are indeed wrestling against spiritual powers (Eph 6:12), and we need to consciously proclaim that Jesus has paid the price for our friend’s deliverance and salvation. We recognise that the enemy has blinded their minds (2 Cor. 4:4), that they are spiritually dead (Eph 2:1) and in the dominion of darkness (Col. 1:13), and in our praying we are coming against this work of the enemy in order to undo it. All of us can engage in this warfare by the positive proclamation of scripture; depending on your maturity and experience some may be led into more direct conflict with the enemy. Stay within your faith level!

Step 4:

Do ask God for forgiveness for the person who may not yet see the need to pray for themselves. Ask God for his mercy. Maybe also ask him what is keeping the person from coming to him. If they simply doubt his existence, pray pardon on their lack of faith. If held back by a relationship, for forgiveness and release from that bondage. Are they held back by an occultic blockage, caused by their own sins or that of their forefathers?

NB: I am in no way intending to imply that we can bypass the individual’s need of personal

repentance, but I suggest that we can make it easier. If we think of individual sins as like building blocks in a wall that people erect between themselves and God, we are seeking to pull them off as soon as they put them on. We're thus reducing the barrier, BUT the person still has to face up to the SIN issue, of living in independence from God. (Do note the difference in scripture between SIN which is a state, and SINS which are individual acts: the reason many do not come through in evangelistic counselling is that they only pray about their sins, and do not face up to the SIN issue. Many are truly sorry for their sins, but have no intention of surrendering themselves to God, without realising that living independently from God is the essence of sin. In Romans 1:1 - 5:11 Paul deals with sins, but in 5:12 - 8:29 he teaches on sin. This is worth a major study in itself!)

It is biblical to pray for someone else's forgiveness: see Luke 23:34 and 1 John 5:16. Many believe that Paul was converted in answer to Stephen's prayer in Acts 7:60. Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring conviction of sin (John 16:8) as in Acts 2:37.

Step 5:

Ask God how he wants to save the person concerned. God has different ways of dealing with individuals, and knows how to get their attention. Consider the following scenarios:

Acts 9:3 intermediary	God meets Paul/Saul out of the blue and on his own, with no human
Acts 8:29-40	the Ethiopian is converted through one-to-one exposition of the scriptures
Acts 16:32	the gaoler is in the context of his own family circle
Acts 10:24	Cornelius has assembled a large house meeting of family and friends
Acts 2: 6&41	We do not know the size of the large public crowd that gathered, only that 3000 were converted out of it.

It is thus possible for us to waste time and energy praying for (or trying to persuade) people to go to meetings that God doesn't want them to attend. However wonderful your church and pastor is, getting your friend there next Sunday evening may not be the way to bring them into the Kingdom of God! Some people need public preaching, or to make a public response; some people need a gentle witness; and sometimes God will say to us "get out of my way, leave them alone, so that I can get at them myself". So...

Step 6:

Obey the instructions God gives, and don't try to improve on them! That doesn't prevent you from asking for an opportunity to witness if that is what God wants.