

When Those Close to You Are Far From God

✖ I have found that where faith for the salvation of the lost is concerned, unbelief controls much of the church. Perhaps it's because we've prayed and waited so long that we are no longer convinced God really will do it.

But if we don't believe God will answer our prayers, we will not pray with consistency and diligence. We may sporadically ask Him, but we certainly will not persevere.

Acts 13:36 says that King David "served the purpose of God in his own generation" (NASB). Our purpose as a generation is to bring in the greatest harvest of souls the world has ever seen.

To accomplish that purpose, we must do some important and fulfilling work. Much of it involves strategic prayer to loose our loved ones from Satan's grasp.

The Bible tells us, "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4).

There is a covering over the minds of unbelievers that keeps them from clearly seeing the light and truth of the gospel. Until unbelievers have an unveiling—a revelation—they won't understand the gospel because the veil prevents them from comprehending it.

Satan's goal is to hide the truth of the gospel in order to keep unbelievers in his grasp. How does he accomplish this?

The Greek word *tuphloo*, translated "blinded" in this verse, means, "to dull the intellect" (The Expanded Vine's Expository

Dictionary of New Testament Words, Bethany House Publishers). Satan has an ability to dull the unbeliever's thinking where the gospel is concerned.

The root word of tuphloo, tupho, has the meaning of making smoke (The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible). Blindness in this passage can be compared to a smoke screen that clouds or darkens the air to the point that a person cannot see clearly.

From this same root comes the word tuphoo which refers to being high-minded, proud or inflated with self-conceit (Strong's). The blindness of the unbeliever to the gospel is directly linked to the root of pride that Satan passed on to humankind in the Garden at the fall.

Pride causes unbelievers to think humanity's knowledge is greater than God's. This leads not to a knowledge dependent on God but to an independent knowledge that looks to one's own mind and intellect as the judge of truth.

This quest for knowledge glorifies one's own reasoning ability and rejects God's knowledge. Because everything is filtered through this inward knowledge, all of which is inundated with pride, it usually translates into the exalting and serving of self and its desires.

Simply stated, self loves anything that satisfies and exalts self. Any message that preaches self-denial or that self needs to be saved is offensive.

The only answer to this self-god is death—the cross—where we die with Christ. The only problem is self wants so desperately to live.

The very nature of pride is to be self-serving and preserving. Thus, the very thing that needs to die is bent on living and must remain the enemy of God in order to do so.

Dealing Pride a Death Blow

Understanding this blinding ability of pride provides a tremendous clue to how to pray effectively for the lost. We must attack the root of pride!

Most rejection of Christ, whether from the works motivation of false religions or the simple fact that most people don't want to give lordship of their lives to another, is due to the veil of pride.

This satanically initiated stronghold is the ultimate enemy of Christ and will be dealt with in finality when every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Christ is Lord. Pride will be dealt its final blow!

How do we deal with the vision-altering force of pride inflicted upon us by the serpent himself, Satan? The Bible identifies a solution for the pride problem and gives us key strategies for effectively praying for unbelievers.

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

We will never win people to Christ on an intellectual basis or through innovative methods alone. Certainly, a continual barrage of nagging and harassing questions won't bring them to the Lord.

In *How to Pray for Your Family and Friends* (Servant Publications), author Quin Sherrer wrote: "I've talked with many women who believed it was their responsibility to do everything in their power to 'make' their husbands become Christians, but by their manipulative scheming, they only

succeeded in turning their husbands away from any interest in spiritual matters. As many wives have learned the hard way, only the Holy Spirit can reveal to an individual the truth of who Jesus is" (see John 16:8-13).

Sometimes we can talk people into a salvation prayer without a true revelation (unveiling), but there is usually no real change because there is no true repentance, which comes only from biblical revelation.

When we approach people on a human basis, especially if they feel we are pressuring them, we generally make things worse. The root of pride in them rises up and defends itself. If we attack this pride on a human level, we will only strengthen it.

But we do have weapons that are "divinely powerful." These weapons, empowered by God, will work miracles.

God's Armory for Breaking Human Pride

Paul E. Billheimer, a 20th-century authority on prayer and author of *Destined for the Throne* (Christian Literature Crusade), said his salvation resulted from spiritual warfare waged on his behalf. He explains: "My mother used these weapons on me. I was as hostile to God as any sinner.

"I was fighting with all my might. But the time came when it was easier to lay down my arms of rebellion than to continue my resistance. The pressure exerted upon me by the Holy Spirit became so powerful that I voluntarily sought relief by yielding my rebellious will.

"The wooing of divine love was so strong that of my own free will I fell into the arms of redeeming grace. I became a willing 'captive.'"

What are these weapons we use in our warfare?

All forms of prayer. This would include supplication, agreement with other Christians, travail, praying in the Spirit, binding and loosing—any biblical form of prayer (see Eph. 6:18).

Praise. God uses our praise of Him as a weapon. Always praise God for the salvation of the one(s) for whom you are praying (see Ps. 149:5-9).

The Word of God. Speaking Scriptures that apply to your situation releases great power against the enemy (see Matt. 4; Luke 4; Eph. 6:17).

The name of Jesus. Though praying in the name of Jesus is our access to the Father, it is also a powerful weapon against demonic powers and strongholds (see Mark 16:17).

These weapons will help produce enlightenment in the unbeliever and reveal a true picture of Christ. We must ask God to lift the veil from unbelievers' spiritual eyes.

As Paul prayed for the Ephesian church, ask God for revelation and enlightenment to come to the one for whom you are praying (see Eph. 1:17-18).

Information Versus Revelation

We need to understand the difference between information and revelation. Information is of the mind; biblical revelation originates from the heart.

Spiritual power is released only through revelation knowledge. The written Word must become the living word. Even as believers, we must not just read but abide in the Word (see Ps. 119:18).

Information can come immediately, but revelation is normally a process. As the parable of the sower demonstrates, all biblical truth comes in seed form (see Matt. 13:1-9).

Knowledge or information alone, which is what humans have glorified since the fall, does not produce salvation. It does not necessarily lead to a true knowledge of God.

The Pharisees knew the Scriptures, but they did not know God (see John 5:39; 8:37). Information from the Word had not progressed to revelation.

Many theologians today know the Scriptures thoroughly but don't know God well. They have much information but little or no revelation.

Revelation makes the Scriptures "spirit" and "life" (John 6:63). It makes them live.

This is so important because we are forever short-circuiting God's process and, in so doing, short-circuiting the results.

Only revelation leads to biblical faith and true change. Without it we are simply appealing to a fallen, selfish, humanistic mind that is always asking, "What's in it for me?"

When we appeal to this mentality through human wisdom and intellect alone, we often preach a humanistic "What's in it for them?" gospel, and we produce humanistic, self-centered converts.

If, on the other hand, we preach a pure gospel, including repentance and the laying down of a person's own life (lordship of Christ), unbelievers are sure to reject it unless they receive a biblical revelation. In fact, our gospel often sounds ridiculous to them (see 1 Cor. 2:14).

What is the solution? We must allow the Holy Spirit time to birth true repentance in unbelievers through God-given revelation.

The Fire Power of Prayer

We must ask God to bring revelation to the unbeliever. Prayer

must accompany the hearing of the gospel. I suggest that the following be included:

- * Pray that the person's heart be prepared, so that it will be "good soil" for the seed (see Mark 4:8).
- * Pray that Satan will not be able to steal the seeds of truth (see Mark 4:15) and that nothing else will be able to destroy the seeds (see Mark 4:16-19).
- * Pray that the Word becomes revelation through the lifting of the veil (see 2 Cor. 4:3-4; Eph. 1:17).
- * Pray that the root of pride be broken (see 2 Cor. 10:3-5).
- * Pray that the person comes to true repentance (see 2 Pet. 3:9; 2 Tim. 2:25-26).

Repentance does not mean to "turn and go another way." That change of direction is the result of repentance. Repentance—metanoia—means to have "a new knowledge or understanding"—a change of mind (Spiros Zodhiates, Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible, AMG Publishers).

In biblical contexts, repentance is a new understanding that comes from God through an unveiling (revelation) and results in a new direction or lifestyle. Biblical repentance will produce God-centered Christians, not self-centered ones. It reverses the effects of the fall through Adam.

Humanity chose their own wisdom, their own knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong. Humanity now needs "a new knowledge" from God.

Paul said in Acts 26:18 that he was called "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light." We help to create this "new knowledge" (repentance) through intercession. Our prayers play a role in the lifting of the veil (revelation), which allows for the heart to be enlightened.

I want to encourage you and see your faith lifted to a new level. God really does want to save those dear to you.

We must be persuaded that God will save the people we love, the ones for whom we pray. We should be so convinced that we would be shocked if they didn't get saved.

Serving our generation demands faith that doesn't quit. We need a motivational faith that truly believes God is hearing us and will answer.

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