

3. Persistent Prayer

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[0 : 00] Father, we thank you that you are high above the nations, that your glory is above the heavens. Lord, we acknowledge that you are seated on high, and yet you look far down.

Father, we know that you raise the poor of the dust, that you lift the needy from the ash heap, and sit them with princes, with the princes of your people. Lord, we recognize with the psalmist that your name is majestic in all the earth, and with him we cry, Lord, what is man that you are mindful of him?

What is the son of man that you care for him? Lord, we are amazed by your concern for each and every one of us, that the hairs on our head are numbered, that all of the days of our lives were written in your book before any of them came to be.

Despite this, Lord, we know that we are anxious and worried about many things, that we are often overtaken by the cares of this life. Concern about health, concern about finance, concern about family.

And Lord, you know us, you know our hearts, and you command us to seek first your kingdom, and promise that all these things will be added unto us, that you will give us what we need for life and for godliness.

[1 : 26] And so we put our confidence, Lord, in your promise, in your plan for the fullness of time to unite all things together under Christ. We know, Lord, that you work all things according to the counsel of your will, that all things work together for the good of those who love you, and that neither death nor life nor angels nor demons nor height nor depth can ever separate us from your love.

And so, Lord, as we come before your mercy seat, as we draw near to you through the living way opened for us by Christ, we pray that you will quieten our hearts, that you will unstop our ears, you will open our eyes to behold the riches of our inheritance, and to understand, Lord, the great love that you have for each one of us.

And so we thank you for this time together to praise and worship you. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, this is our third and final study under the heading of Everyday Evangelism.

And just to finish, I wanted to read from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 9, verse 35, down to chapter 10, verse 7. That's on page 814.

Chapter 9, verse 35, to 10, verse 7. Jesus has been travelling around preaching and healing.

[2 : 57] And we're told, And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every affliction.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few.

Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. And he called to him his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.

The names of the twelve apostles are these. First, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother, Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew, the tax collector, James, the son of Alphaeus and Thaddeus, Simon the Canaanian, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and proclaim as you go, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

[4 : 24] Amen. Amen. A few months ago, I was living in the south side of Glasgow, and I used to get the train from Central Station every night.

And I'm sure if you go to Central Station, you see there's a lot of young people hanging out there. Some people dressed as punks. Some people who describe themselves as neo-Nazis.

Some people, I think, would describe themselves as emos. Teenagers that wear sort of dark clothes and look sort of moody, don't seem to be enjoying themselves very much.

And I would always be rushing for a train, and I would always pray, Lord, won't you please send someone who can minister to these people? I'm, you know, I'm a little bit, I sort of wear M&S; trousers and shirts and jumpers.

I thought they might not listen to me particularly. But I just prayed the Lord would send someone.

One day I was in the bookshop, and this American walked in. He had tattoos on both arms, tattoos all over his head, piercings.

[5 : 29] The people with him had piercings and tattoos. And rather than being worried, I was very happy to see him, because this was my friend, Pastor Clay from America. And he and his friends run a church somewhere in Texas.

And I said, well, it's wonderful you're here. They'd come for a mission. I said, I've got some people I'd love you to meet. And so they went down to Central Station. And the next day they showed me a photograph of them, their arms around all these kids.

They'd been spending hours talking to them, sharing the gospel with them, and telling them of the God who cares for them. And one of the girls said to them, you know, why does no one ever come and talk to us? You're the first person that's actually come to share with us.

Well, I was so thankful to God. I had prayed that he would send someone, and Pastor Clay and his friends turned up and ministered to these youth. I was amazed, but I shouldn't have been amazed, because of course, in Matthew chapter 9, Jesus tells us to pray for that.

Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers, to send out workers into his harvest. Jesus sees the great multitudes of people, and he recognises the need for workers to go into that great harvest field, to teach, to preach, to proclaim the kingdom.

[6 : 45] And he commands us, his followers, to pray for workers. Chapter 9 follows on from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus had been teaching there, and at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, which is verse 29 of chapter 7, we're told that his teaching, he taught as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.

And that word authority is a key word in chapters 8 and 9. Jesus then goes on to demonstrate his authority over sickness. He demonstrates his authority by healing a leper, by raising somebody close to death.

He demonstrates his authority over nature by calming a storm. He demonstrates his authority over unclean spirits by exercising a man possessed by demons.

He demonstrates his authority in forgiving a man of his sins. And he demonstrates his authority by raising a young girl to life. Jesus demonstrates his authority over sin, over death, and over the devil.

And, of course, in response to that authority, he looks for obedience. And throughout these two chapters, he's doing two things. He is commending people for their faith. Several times he says, I have never found such faith in Israel.

[8 : 08] He rebukes his disciples. He says, O you of little faith. And when he sees the faith of those who come to him for healing, he heals them. He's looking for faith, and he is commanding people to follow me.

Chapter 8, verse 22. He calls this man to follow him. Later on, he calls Levi, and he says, follow me. And he does, leaving behind his tax collector's business.

So we see the authority of Jesus, and we see the response that he is looking for of faith and following. And it's a very busy couple of chapters. We're told several times that there were great crowds.

Chapter 8, verse 1. There were great crowds surrounding Jesus. Chapter 8, verse 16. He saw a crowd. And in our passage here, verse 36 of chapter 9, when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them.

These tremendous groups of people, hundreds and hundreds coming to him, and he has compassion. Why? Because they are harassed and they are helpless. Some of them are struggling with illness, sickness.

[9 : 18] Some of them have financial worries. Some of them are grieving, concerned about relatives. Some of them are anxious about the things of this life.

And Jesus has compassion because they are like sheep without a shepherd. That's an image often used in the Bible to describe people lacking leadership. There was a lot of political leadership in Israel at the time, but the priests and the rulers had failed to lead the people, to teach them the scriptures, to encourage them in their faith, to pray for them and build them up in the word of God. And so the people were harassed and helpless and Jesus has tremendous compassion upon them. And so he commands the disciples to recognize the harvest and then to pray into it, to pray that God will raise up more workers.

That's a prayer that was prayed then and that's a prayer that needs to be prayed for Glasgow today. As I stand here, I can actually see, in fact, the great crowds of people walking up and down Buchanan Street.

Thousands rolling past the church doors every day. And at this time in Scotland, it's fair to say most of these people will never have the faintest inclination to enter into a church building.

[10 : 35] Most of them, in my experience, at least, have very little understanding of the gospel, of the things of Christ, of the wonders of scripture. So the prayer Jesus prayed in Israel is a prayer we need to take on our lips today to pray that God will raise up laborers for the harvest field in Glasgow.

Give you some examples of that. Some of the things I've been praying for in recent months there were, of course, the kids outside Central Station praying for the youth that they will remember their creator in the days of their youth.

But there's a lot of people who come to the city center every day just around the corner from Bath Street. They're renovating a shop and I said to the builders, what are you making here?

And they said, it's a bookie. And I said, there's already four bookies on this street. Do we need another one? Five bookies on one street just around the corner from the church. But the bookies are full every day.

Pubs in the city center opening at 10 o'clock filled with men, mostly men, numbing the pain of their broken lives, watching the horses racing. Harassed and helpless, hopeless and without God.

[11 : 45] But there's other things happening in the city which we need to pray for. There's going to be a new campus, I believe, on Cathedral Street. We already have Caledonian University, the Strathclyde, and now City of Glasgow College plans to build a multi-million, 200 million pound campus on Cathedral Street.

That means in the city center there will be approximately 40,000 students studying within half a mile of the church. If you know something of the CUs, you'll know that most CUs in Britain are fairly small, maybe 30 to 50 people, and therefore of these three campuses there's unlikely to be less than a few hundred believers.

We need to pray therefore that the Lord will raise up laborers for the harvest field right on our doorstep among these young people. There's a lot of people in Glasgow from different nations. You've probably heard me talk about this before, but it's fascinating if you spend an afternoon when it's sunny, of course, in George Square, meeting people from all these different closed countries, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia.

A few weeks ago, in fact, I went with a couple of the apprentices to Eglinton Toll, and there's a Somalian community there. There's a little restaurant, very reasonably priced, two pounds for a plate of lamb, delicious.

[13 : 06] There's a restaurant, there's a community center, but every day there are just people standing around, very few British friends. And as you'll know, Somalia is a country, it's a lawless country, the government has collapsed, it's run by a militant Islamic regime.

There is, I think, very little indigenous Christianity, and yet in Glasgow, Somalian people come, and they live, and they have a community center, and yet I know of no Christians who are regularly going to visit them, who are praying for them, or who are seeking to learn their language.

In Queen Street, there are a row of Turkish shops, cafes, restaurants, hairdressers. Again, Turkey is the largest un-evangelized country in Europe, tens of millions of people without the basic understanding of the gospel.

And yet on Queen Street, we have a little Turkish community, an opportunity to go there, to have coffee, to get to know people, to pray for them, to share with them. We need to pray that the Lord

will raise up laborers for his harvest field, to recognize the great needs in our city, to see the wonderful opportunities, and then to take the step to go and speak with people.

And the question is, of course, who will the Lord send? When I was living in Pollock Shields, I moved there, and I had this great expectancy that the doors of these lovely big houses would be thrown open, and I'd be invited in to dinner and to hold Bible studies in these comfortable lounges.

[14 : 40] But it never happened. And just before I left, I was going for a walk one evening, I was preparing a sermon, and often I'll just walk around and speak to myself, and maybe that's why the doors weren't open.

They just knew me as the man who wandered around speaking to himself. But whatever happened, I did a circuit around this sort of block, and I passed the man with a dog, and I just walked around again, and the second time I passed him, and he said to me, I'm walking a dog, what's your reason? And he thought I was a burglar, he thought I was casing some of these big houses with a view to robbing them. And I said, well, actually, I'm preparing a sermon on Colossians. And I took him back. But then he announced that he was the parish minister, and we spoke a little of Colossians, and I said, well, the thing is, you see, I've been here a couple of years, and I just don't think people are very friendly, I don't get invited into their homes, nobody seems to want to talk to me.

And he said something that was very perceptive. He said, unless you're a member of Hagg's Castle Golf Club, or a member of Titwood Tennis Club, or a governor at Hutchies, you're nowhere socially.

[15 : 48] And that made me think, I thought, you know, I'm waiting for people to fling open their doors, but I'm not actually going out to the golf club or the tennis club or to the community groups, and seeking to get to know people.

It made me think. And Jesus, having just commanded his disciples to pray for laborers, in chapter 10, he then sends them out as laborers, sends them out into the harvest field.

He called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal every disease and affliction. He gives them some of the authority he has just shown them.

Verse 5, these twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Perhaps you're like me. You pray for your neighbors, you pray for your friends, you pray for your colleagues. And the prayer I often pray is, Lord, won't you send someone to speak to them? It's the prayer Moses prayed, isn't it?

[16 : 53] Lord, won't you send someone else? And yet here it seems to suggest that those who pray for laborers in the harvest field will often be sent out into that harvest field themselves.

And if the Lord has put it on your heart to pray for those you work with and you live with, perhaps he is also sending you out to be a witness to him in that community.

Now, of course, the apostles had training, hadn't they? They had years of experience. They'd heard his teaching. He gifted them to speak. But it's clear that not everyone is called to preach, but of course everyone is called to witness to Jesus.

Chapter 9, verse 31. We've got this lovely story of the blind men and Jesus heals them. They just met him. They recognized who he was. He touches their eyes.

They can see. And he says to them, now at this point you mustn't tell anyone what I've done. In chapter 9, verse 31, they went away and spread his fame through all that district.

[17 : 59] It's funny, isn't it? We're commanded to evangelize and we find it so difficult. These men were commanded not to evangelize and they go and spread the fame of Jesus throughout that district. They simply told people what Jesus had done for them.

And what a wonderful testimony that is. A testimony every believer can share. Only yesterday I was sitting reading a newspaper in the university campus. And somebody asked me just that.

I explained what I was doing. And he said, tell me why you do that. And I just very simply told him a little of my testimony. And that opened up a conversation. So every Christian has a testimony they're able to share with the people they encounter.

But where does Jesus send us out? And I think it's in recent months I've just been looking at how I spend my time and where I spend my time and asking the question, am I actually coming into contact with people on a regular basis with whom I can share?

And I've been very helped by a book. I don't think we have it in stock called Everyday Church by Steve Timmis and Tim Chester. They have lots of helpful practical suggestions. For example, if you

have lunch every day, if you have a lunch break, don't just sit at your desk.

[19 : 12] Why not go into the staff canteen? Sit next to someone, get to know them. If you and your friends like to meet in a cafe for coffee, why not go to the same place and build a relationship with the staff and the regulars there?

If you work in the city centre, why not go and sit on a wall, sit in George Square, see who you meet? Where do we spend our time socially? Do we spend all of our time, all of our spare time engaged in Christian activities, prayer meetings, house groups, things which are, of course, wonderful in themselves?

But do we ever find ourselves in a social setting with people who aren't Christians? Should we be thinking about joining a tennis club or a knitting group, going to the library and meeting people in a reading group?

Where can we go to meet people and begin relationships? And actually, where do we work? One of the reasons I go up to the campus is because I don't like doing admin.

I'm not really a fan of checking emails and anything with a spreadsheet just, you know, switches me straight to sleep. But I thought, well, if I start to do my admin in a public place, we'll just see what happens.

[20 : 20] So I started going up to the university. There's free Wi-Fi. And normally I don't like being interrupted, but when I'm doing admin, I just love it. And it was amazing how many times someone would find themselves at the table next door or would recognize me and would be able to speak.

Jesus sent his disciples out. Most people in Glasgow won't come into a church. They might come into a Christianity explore. They might not. But we need to be going out regularly, consistently, not always individually.

Go with friends and spending time among people and with people, taking an interest in them and praying that they will take an interest in the one who sent us. But that's terrifying, of course.

And Jesus goes on to tell his disciples, yes, that it is terrifying. He's sending them as sheep among wolves. He acknowledges that they will face opposition, political opposition, family opposition, personal opposition.

He's very honest with them that it is frightening. And it's interesting throughout the New Testament how often believers pray for boldness. Apostles in Acts chapter 4, they'd begun preaching, they'd seen a revival, there was a sort of a, the religious leaders took exception to it and punished them.

[21 : 38] And they gathered together and prayed, Lord, let us continue to speak your word with boldness. And then Paul in prison in Colossae, in prison for preaching the gospel, you might be inclined to stop preaching the gospel if you've been thrown in prison.

But what does he pray? He prays, pray that I will open my mouth to speak the gospel and make it clear and make it bold. Throughout his letters, he's always asking God to give him boldness.

One evangelist, writing a book, said, the fear never goes away, but with practice it does diminish. Evangelism is always frightening, but the more we do it, the more the fear diminishes. And it's understandable why it is frightening. Of course, Jesus explains that the message of the gospel divides people.

When we seek to move a conversation on to the gospel, we're taking a risk with the relationship.

That person will either respond positively in faith, in which case we'll have them not just as a friend or a colleague, but as a brother or sister in Christ.

[22 : 47] The relationship will draw closer. Or the person might think we're a little bit odd, the kind of person that walks around talking to themselves, for example. There might be a barrier, there might be a tension there.

in that relationship. The gospel divides people. And so when we seek to share it, we're taking a risk of a person who will either be drawn nearer to us, or potentially driven away from us.

And yet it's a risk worth taking. Just a few months after this building opened, a young Chinese lady came in, stood at the book room there, and we spoke about everything under the sun, and I was trying to avoid any kind of spiritual conversation, because it was four o'clock, I needed to lock up.

But she just stood there, and I thought, I'm just, I'm dodging my responsibility here. So I said to her, may I ask, are you a Christian? And two weeks later, she was baptized, and went on to become a very fruitful and effective witness to Christ during her time in Glasgow.

There was a risk. I could have just wished her well and sent her on her way, but the Lord prompted me to take that risk, and he drew her, not simply through that, there were many other things in her

life, but he drew her to himself.

[23 : 58] We are to pray, therefore, for laborers in the harvest field. We are to understand that if we pray that, the Lord may send us into the harvest field locally, perhaps internationally.

But the thing to remember as we go is that it is his harvest field. Later on in chapter 11, John the Baptist sends to Jesus to ask if he is the one to come.

And in chapter 11, verse 4, Jesus tells John, or his disciples, go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.

Jesus reminds John what he has accomplished by his word. He's opened the eyes of the blind, he's enabled the lame to walk, he's raised the dead, and he's set prisoners free.

The poor have good news preached to them. And as we seek to share the gospel, as we seek to bring people to the scriptures, we recognize that the Lord is the Lord of the harvest field.

[25 : 08] That these are not the words of men, but of God. That it is his spirit and his power which convicts people of the truth. There's that lovely tale in Acts, isn't there, of Paul going to the river to find someone to talk to, and he meets Lydia, and as they're speaking, Luke tells us, the Lord opened her heart to understand the message.

Paul sought to communicate the message boldly and clearly, but it was the Lord who opened her heart. And still today, the Lord who opened the eyes of the blinds is the one who opens the eyes and the minds of those who have been blinded by the God of this age.

The Lord who caused the lame to walk is the one who by his power enables people to walk in a manner worthy of Christ. The Lord who raised the dead to life is the one who sees us dead in our trespass, but who makes us alive together with Christ.

We're sent out into the harvest field, but it is his harvest field. It is his word and his spirit which works. So we are to pray for laborers.

We are to recognize the tremendous harvest around us and our need for laborers to come alongside. And we are to pray that the Lord, the Lord of the harvest will bless our weak and our foolish laborers.

[26 : 30] He will take our weak, empty hands and use them and our words to bless others, to bring them to a saving knowledge of himself, to bring them into his family, and to bring them ultimately into glory.

Well, this is my final week in Glasgow. It's been great to be here these past eight years. I did have some happy times in Pollock Shields, I should point out. But my prayer as I go is that the Lord will raise up laborers for the harvest field.

Some I've mentioned, some other opportunities that you will know of. But the Lord will make each of us a laborer, someone who is willing to share testimony to spread the fame of Jesus among those we know.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your gospel.

We thank you, Lord, that we were once dead in sin, blinded by Satan, unable to walk in a manner worthy of you, that because of your great mercy and your love. You gave us new life.

[27 : 41] You cleansed us from sin. You brought us into your family. You put a new song in our mouths and you promised us a place and an inheritance in heaven.

We thank you, Lord, for the free gift of eternal life, which is the power of God for salvation for all who will believe, and that you accept people from every nation who fear you and who do what is right.

So, Lord, as we depart from this place, we pray you will make us sensitive to that harvest field, that you will give us your compassion for those in Glasgow hungry and helpless, Lord, without hope, without God in this world.

And, Lord, you will show us where we individually can minister to people, where we can show that compassion and love to individuals or families, where we can begin to share something of what your Son has done for each of us and to announce his kingdom to them.

Lord, there are so many people in Glasgow who are completely unreached, who have no Christian friends and no desire ever to enter a church. And so we pray, Lord, that in the days and weeks and months ahead you will raise up workers for your harvest field.

[28 : 58] You will give people a heart for the lost. You will give them skills and gifts and abilities to minister to them and open doors of opportunity to share and to speak for Christ.

And so, Lord, we pray that you will be with us now, encourage our hearts, calm our fears and help us, Lord, to walk daily closer with you in the power of your Spirit.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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