

Introduction

Liberty Street and Church Street – New York, New York, 10006. Can someone tell me what that is? It’s ground zero. It’s the location of the 9-11 terrorist attacks that destroyed the Twin Towers. The term **ground zero**” has a relatively broad definition. It connotes several things, one of which is this. It’s the origin of something.

Let me ask you a question in that regard. What is the **“ground zero”** or origin of rescuing the perishing. Where does a person deciding to follow Jesus begin? Colossians 4:2-4 tells us. It’s prayer.

Ground Zero

In verse 2, Paul exhorts the Christians to whom he’s writing to be thankful for prayer. They will **“devote”** themselves to it if they are. The Greek word translated **“devote”** connotes **“continuous.”** People who recognize the value of prayer, in other words, will constantly pray.

Having exhorted his readers to pray generally in verse 2, Paul requests that they pray specifically in verse 3 – for him as he seeks to **“speak forth the mystery of Christ.”** That clause refers to his evangelistic efforts to win the perishing to Jesus.

Paul’s request implies something about rescuing the perishing that all of us need to grasp. It’s a supernatural process. The defining realities and issues involved in it happening are spiritual not natural. Jesus said it well in John 6:44, **“No one can come to me, unless the Father who sent Me, draws him.”** The simple fact is it’s totally beyond our reach to get someone to Jesus. It’s a God-thing not a human-thing.

That means that the four “Powerful P’s” of sales (persuasion, promotion, programs, and personality) aren’t decisive factors in witnessing. There’s only one thing that is and it’s prayer. It is the “Powerful P,” the Ground Zero, of witnessing. The origin of almost every person coming to Jesus is prayer. It’s some Christian or Christians praying devotedly. If they had not prayed, the person would not have

come to Jesus. Because they prayed, he or she did.

So, let's pray. That's our call. We've been talking about rescuing the perishing for a month now. Well, our very first responsibility in that regard is to pray.

And Paul tells us how in verse 3, "**keeping alert in it.**" The Greek word translated "**alert**" there connotes "**concentrated.**" We should pray with focus in other words. "**With focus**" means with specificity. We move beyond praying generically to pray precisely. In *A Life that Matters* Ron Hutchcraft uses the word "**targets**" in that regard. We should focus our prayer on particular targets. Doing so directs God's power to them. Let identify and examine those targets.

Open Doors

One is what Hutchcraft calls "**open doors.**" Look at verse 3. Paul asks his readers to pray that God will "**open up to us a door for the word.**" That metaphor suggests God giving us opportunities to witness. He orchestrates circumstances so that we're able to bring up Jesus to the perishing. There are two kinds of open doors.

One is natural opportunities with people we know. God directs an encounter with them so that we don't have to force talking about Jesus. Talking about Him rises normally from the nature of the conversation or circumstance instead. That of course makes our witness far more effective.

A Christian asked God to give him a chance to tell his daughter-in-law's perishing father about Jesus. At a family birthday party several weeks later, the father began talking to him about how smart their grandchildren were. He then suddenly asked him, "**Who's the smartest person you know?**" To which the Christian, led by the Holy Spirit, replied, "**It's Jesus.**" Curious, the father asked him what he meant by that, which opened the door for him to explain Jesus as the smartest person who ever lived. That was a natural opportunity.

Now, we should practice what we pray. The more we know about Jesus and His gospel, the more the Holy Spirit has to work with in giving

us natural opportunities. So let's put feet to our prayers for open doors. Let's learn as many details as we can about Jesus and His gospel.

There is a second kind of open door. It's "**divine appointments**" with people we don't know. God arranges a meeting between a Christian and a perishing but receptive person. He then reveals Himself to that person through spiritual gifts or other supernatural phenomena, which enables the Christian to tell him or her about Jesus.

A Christian businessman Kerry was always asking God to give him opportunities to witness. One day, as he was driving home from work, the thought entered his mind to stop at a particular restaurant, look for a certain waitress, and tell her about Jesus. So, he went into the restaurant and sat down, whereupon a waitress, whom he had never met, approached him and said, "**You have something for me don't you?**" "**Yes,**" he replied and shared two words of knowledge the Holy Spirit gave him about a relationship and her job, both of which were troubling her. Knowing she was encountering God, she began conversing with Kerry. They then prayed together, after which she decided to follow Jesus. That was a divine appointment.

We now know one of the targets upon which we should focus our prayers. It's open doors. We ask God to give us natural opportunities and divine appointments to tell the perishing about Jesus.

Convicted Minds

A second target is convicted minds, those of the perishing that we're trying to rescue. When I say minds, I'm referring to what psychologists mean by that – their thoughts and feelings.

It's critical that we understand the minds of the perishing. Their condition is this. Overcome by the world, Satan, and their own sinful nature, they have layer upon layer of thoughts and feelings that are turned against Jesus and His gospel. They can't respond to Him and it, therefore, any more than a dead person can.

That's where the Holy Spirit comes in. He breaks through all of

those layers and brings a new thought to their minds. That thought is that Jesus is the greatest and best and that they're profit greatly by being and doing what He wants. That new thought, as it comes to them, brings a new feeling. That new feeling is a complex one that involves two things. One is longing – for the new thought to be true. The other is grief – that their thoughts, feelings, and actions (the totality of their lives) are set against it. We call that new thought and feeling that the Holy Spirit creates **“conviction of sin.”**

The conviction of sin causes a dramatic change. The perishing now have a choice they didn't have before. They can say **“no”** to the new thought and feeling and keep on being and doing what they want. Or they can say **“yes”** to them and start being and doing what Jesus wants. That second decision, if they make it, rescues them.

Understanding the process I just explained helps us pray with focus. We ask the Holy Spirit to convict the mind of the perishing person we want to rescue in ways that are peculiar to him or her.

I filled out several “Rescuer-Perishing” cards. Let me read the comments about the perishing person on one of those: **“A third generation non-Christian. Thinks the praise of others is the measure of success in life. Desires status, therefore, more than anything else. Takes great pride in her educational level and financial success and enjoys the standing they give her in the eyes of her acquaintances and friends.”** That is a layer of thought and feeling that the Holy Spirit must break through in order to rescue that perishing person. So, I ask Him to do just that. I ask Him to speak and work to reveal two things to her: (1) how insignificant and unsatisfying the praise of people is; and (2) how significant and satisfying the praise of Jesus is.

That illustrates a second target upon which we should focus our prayers for the perishing. It's convicted minds. We ask God, through the Holy Spirit, to break through the layers of their thoughts and feelings that are turned against Jesus and His gospel, and give them new ones.

Broken Hearts

There's a third target, found in Romans 9:2. Referring to perishing Jews, Paul writes, "**I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.**" The third target is broken hearts. The hearts I'm referring to here are those of Christians. Broken hearts are about two things.

The first is how we think about the perishing. We view them primarily in terms of the invisible realities about them not the visible. C.S. Lewis described two of those invisible realities this way. The perishing are immortals who will one day, in hell, "**be a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.**" The most defining realities about the perishing are an empty temporal life on earth and a terrifying eternal life in hell.

Broken hearts are about a second thing – how we feel about the perishing. Thoughts, as we've learned before, always cultivate accompanying feelings. Well, the thoughts I just described cultivate the feelings of "**sorrow**" and "**grief**" to quote Paul in Romans 9:2. That sorrow and grief in turn are triggers that compel us to rescue them.

Take an Akron attorney I knew named Richard as an example of what I mean. I thought of him primarily in terms of the visible. He was one of the city's most successful and respected attorneys who wielded great clout. He was also arrogant and crude. Thinking of him that way, my heart was cold - full of contempt but devoid of sorrow and grief - and I didn't tell him about Jesus. But suppose I had thought of him primarily in terms of the invisible, as an immortal with an empty present and terrifying future. Thinking of him that way, my heart would have been broken – full of sorrow and grief and I would have told him about Jesus.

We see then that the heart is central to rescuing the perishing. One of the primary reasons Christians don't witness is they don't have the heart for it. Their hearts are cold. One of the primary reasons they do witness is they do have the heart for it. Their hearts are broken. So, we pray and ask God to give us broken hearts. We then practice what we pray by learning in detail what the Bible says about the perishing.

Empowered Mouths

A fourth target upon which we should focus our prayers is empowered mouths. Notice Paul's concern in the second half of verse 3 and in verse 4. It's the effectiveness of what he would speak to the perishing. We should be concerned about that too, and so we pray for empowered mouths. I take that terminology from Exodus 4:12. God called Moses to speak on His behalf and promised this if he would, "**Now, then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth.**"

What God did for Moses, He can and will do for us. He will be with our mouths, that is, actually put His words in them. We may not know what to say or how to say it to the perishing. But God will take us outside ourselves and deliver His message through us. He will display His power by giving us wisdom and words we don't even know we have.

I had a friend in Barberton named William who was a blue-collar worker at a local factory. He never went to college, never spoke publicly, and wasn't especially articulate and smart. But he had a broken heart for the perishing and prayed the same thing every day: "**Lord, lead me to a lost person today and give me the words to speak when You do.**" That's probably why he was the most effective "**soul-winner**" as we say it that I've personally ever met. I remember visiting and talking with three people he had led to Jesus – in the same week. William asked for the power to speak and God gave it. We should too.

Conclusion

I close with the words of the celebrated British preacher Charles Spurgeon: "**If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for.**" That is one of the greatest challenges you will ever hear. Don't let anyone you know go to hell unwarned and especially unprayed for. Ask God for open doors, convicted minds, broken hearts, and empowered mouths. Why? It's the Ground Zero of rescuing the perishing is prayer.