

# Prayer Walking

## *The Harvest in Our Communities*

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We must reach our cities and communities for Christ. Cities are central to God's redemptive strategy not because God values the city people more than those living in rural areas but because of the vast numbers living in the cities. "Fishing 101" tells us, if we want to catch *some* fish, we should go to where *many* fish are located. This may sound a bit simplistic, but it makes good, sound common sense. You can ask any fisherman who knows how to catch fish. If we look at our society today, we see that great revival movements tend to begin in a city and spread outward to outlying areas. For this reason, it makes sense for us to emphasize the good news to the cities, not to the exclusion of the rural areas, but an effort equal to the possible numbers of conversions. The Great Commission began with a city, Jerusalem, and will culminate when another city, the New Jerusalem, becomes God's dwelling place with His people.

God's strategy to take your city for Christ begins with you and other members of your local church and the church community. The decision for success starts first with us individually, followed by our friends, our local church, and finally the entire Christian community. When the entire Christian community gets involved, it will transcend denominational lines and include all Bible-believing churches along with the parachurch organizations that stress a personal relationship with Christ. Many of the parachurch organizations will target a certain group of people such as athletes, business people, professional workers, and military personnel. Their efforts cross denominational lines and this is one reason they can be very effective. The first step is unified prayer. It is a pleasant surprise for some to find people who attend other churches, praying as though they know the same God we do.

In 1857 a massive citywide revival broke out as a result of one man named Jeremiah Lamphier, who started a weekly prayer session for business in the city of New York. From an initial crowd of six, the gathering grew from a weekly to a daily event with attendance of 10,000. Thousands of men gave their hearts to Christ in those meetings. When the final tally was taken, 1 million souls were affected by that effort. *It all started with one man and his burden for his city.* What would happen if pastors and laity came together *in unity* for their cities and towns? Pray the Bay"—This is a cooperative effort of hundreds of churches in and around the San Francisco area. Their prayers are making a big difference in this city known for great sin. A four-day prayer summit in Vancouver, British Columbia, has led to "Pray Vancouver" where hundreds are now participating. These examples came about because a small group decided that the power in them was greater than the power that *seemed* to have control of their city. Link the prayer cells in your city. They are there and waiting for someone with vision to launch them into meaningful pursuits. Do not exclude anyone as long as they adhere to the Scriptural principles Jesus gave us.

### Thoughts on cities and communities

God **looks** at the city—**Nineveh**. There are some cities that, in our estimation, would not seem to deserve the special attention of God. Nineveh was such a city, and its wickedness had gotten God's attention. Witchcraft, prostitution, exploiting the people, plotting against the Lord, plundering in war, and wholesale violence, were just a few of the charges against this city. Many of us would agree that Nineveh got what it deserved. In fact, it sounds a lot like some cities we know about. God saw that which was hidden to the human eye, much like many of the cities of today. All we need is a Jonah. If God could save a city with a reluctant evangelist, what could He do with someone who welcomed the challenge? We understand that Jonah was not excited about his assignment. On the positive side, however, he had a sermon that required

a minimum of preparation. It was “*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*” The result of that short message was a citywide revival that saved the city.

God **cares** about the city—**Jerusalem**. The thought of Jesus weeping over a city prompts some questions as to why this collection of bricks, stones, buildings, and streets would cause such a reaction. Every city has its own character and personality. When we think of Paris, Rome, Cairo, New York, or Tokyo certain features spring to our minds. Here a city, destined to affect the world while on earth and recreated for eternity, was turning away from God. What would happen if we were to develop the same feeling for the city in which we live? A church that seeks the salvation of unheeding and hardened neighbors shares the spiritual tenderness of Jesus, who wept over Jerusalem because of its residents’ resistance to truth.

God has a **Christian force** in the city—**Corinth**. A church that ministers with the desire to see people in its community turn to God and to see their lives changed is a spiritual heir to Paul, who looked over Corinth and heard the voice of God’s assurance: “*I have much people in this city*” (Acts 18:10). The job of winning a city for Christ is a task that can overwhelm us if we feel we are trying to do it alone. This feeling will surely come because it is a tool of the devil to try to isolate us and make us think we are all alone in this venture. Many people feel as Paul did. Jonah, Elijah, and John the Baptist are just a few other Biblical examples. Being discouraged is normal from time to time, but we must remember God is in control and that help, both physical and spiritual, is always much closer than we think. Jesus sent His disciples out to minister and be a blessing to the people. He does the same today. He did not create us to be defeated.

There is a **great harvest** in the city. While the reference to *city* may stir images of skyscrapers, subways and slums, it intends to convey the idea that in whatever population center you live—in city, town, or village, among hundreds or handfuls—a harvest of souls awaits your evangelistic action. The ability to hear the still, small, quiet voice in the city is a challenge, because city life appears to be at a pace that does not allow time for quiet introspection. But the hunger is there and God will provide the opportunity if we will labor in the harvest of the city. A large harvest is a possibility because of the large number of people available. Problems associated with traveling great distances are eliminated because of the population density.

### **Steps toward reaching your city or community**

**Research your church’s attitude toward the harvest.** This may seem like an obvious and unnecessary area to investigate because we are supposed to be supportive to growth. Many groups want to reach out, but they fail to realize this often means giving up a certain part of their comfort level, and new growth causes all of us to stretch a bit. What happens when someone with different worship styles or dress or background appears not only in *your* church, but in *your* pew? Can God be in multitudes of little, loud, intruders taking over *your* section? Do we view this as growth or the beginning of the Great Tribulation? Some think small is better. It allows you to get to know everybody, and while that is true, it works against the heart of God and portrays us as an elitist group. We do not need big megachurches, but we do need an attitude of hospitality to those who come to us.

What is your church’s attitude toward those who are different? This is a fair question and one that must be answered. Analyze the harvest in your community. Name a task force of responsible men and women who will conduct a demographic study and add to it their own knowledge and impressions of the community. Make sure your task force is representative of the whole community, or at least your target neighborhood. The first thing to look at is the need for the area in question. This will include physical, nutritional,

environmental, etc. It is assumed, and rightly so, that spiritual needs will all be the same, but civic-type outreaches can open many spiritual doors.

- Are the elderly fully served, or is there a need for affordable daycare, medical vacillates, teen center possibilities. These and many other special needs can assist us in reaching the target community.
- Is there a new immigrant population nearby (teaching English provides a great opportunity for witnessing, and the need is great). Look around, fill a need, and pray for the harvest. It will come!

**Determine the best target population and area.** Based on the information gathered by your analysis and fact-gathering methods, decide where evangelism is most needed and how you are capable of ministering. It will be easy to see needs, but budget and personnel limitations may play a role in how successful you will be at the start. If in your praying you feel God leading you, do not be inadequate. Stay with it. Do not be afraid of starting small; instead, be afraid of not starting at all.

- Draw a map of your intended focus area and begin to pray for the people there. This map will be a great visual reminder of the decision made to join in the harvest and it will help you to prayerfully bond with other believers and explore the opportunities available in that area.
- Remember that the goal of setting up a target area is to find the people who need ministry, and in doing so they will find the answers to their spiritual search.

**“Prayer walk” the target area.** Go with your family or a prayer partner and walk the area in which you want to labor. From a physical point of view, this helps you “get a feel” for the turf. Most of the sports teams, who are playing away from their home field, walk on the field the day before the game when there is nobody in the stands. They go just to get a feel for where they are going to perform. It helps focus their attention on the reason they are there. The same can be true of a physical, visual look at the target area of ministry.

- Talk to God about each home or apartment. It is possible to create a bond with an area or a house without knowing the occupants. If you ask God to give you the opportunity to minister to them, He will grant you grace in the form of empathy, sensitivity, love, concern, boldness and an opportunity for the greatest experience of your life—sharing the good news.
- A prayer walk is an outward sign from you to God that you are indeed serious about bearing fruit for the Kingdom. God will honor your efforts.

**Develop a long-range plan for evangelism.** A vision of what you want to accomplish, accompanied by a long-term plan, is vital for you to build a strategy that will produce results. The addition of short-term measurable goals is necessary not only to evaluate your progress, but as encouragement to you and to those around you.

- Set a realistic goal for 10 years with two-year reviews of how you are doing and what can be done to improve if needed. This is also a good time to talk about what is working for you and adjust accordingly.
- A plan that is 100 percent enthusiasm, with no short-term goals or mile markers, will burn out as the participants have little idea whether they are on track. Enthusiasm fades fast without the satisfaction of seeing progress. The story is told of a great swimmer who was

attempting to swim the English channel. After hours of battling the elements she just gave up, saying she didn't feel she was making any progress. She soon found out she had given up just one-half mile from the completion of this feat. She admitted that if she had been able to see the goal and know it was within reach she would have had no trouble completing the swim from England to France. We all need to see the goal and know we are making progress.

- Celebrate this "Harvest Plan" and encourage the entire church to commit publicly to it.

### **Closing thought**

If you strive to have the same values and priorities Jesus had, you will find evangelism happening naturally. It becomes a lifestyle and not a project. Famed evangelist Billy Graham once said, "What makes us as Christians shrug our shoulders when we ought to be flexing our muscles? What makes us apathetic in a day when there are loads to lift, a world to be won and captives to be set free? Why are so many people bored when the times demand action?"

The world has more winnable people than ever before, but it is possible to come out of a ripe field empty-handed. Don't let that happen! May God bless your efforts!