

THE NATURE OF EVANGELISTIC PRAYER

Paul writes, “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,” [1 Timothy 2:1 \(NASB\)](#)

While the first three terms Paul uses are virtually synonymous, there are among them some subtle shades of meaning that enrich our concept of prayer. “**Entreaties**” refers to prayer that arises from a sense of need. Knowing what is lacking, we plead with God to supply it. As we look out on the masses of lost humanity, the enormity of the need should drive us to our knees in evangelistic prayer.

The seventeenth-century English Puritan Richard Baxter wrote,

“Oh, if you have the hearts of Christians or of men in you, let them yearn towards your poor ignorant, ungodly neighbours. Alas, there is but a step betwixt them and death and hell; many hundred diseases are waiting ready to seize on them, and if they die unregenerate, they are lost forever. Have you hearts of rock, that cannot pity men in such a case as this? If you believe not the Word of God, and the danger of sinners, why are you Christians yourselves? If you do believe it, why do you not bestir yourself to the helping of others? Do you not care who is damned, so you be saved? If so, you have sufficient cause to pity yourselves, for it is a frame of spirit utterly inconsistent with grace ... Dost thou live close by them, or meet them in the streets, or labour with them, or travel with them, or sit and talk with them, and say nothing to them of their souls, or the life to come? If their houses were on fire, thou wouldst run and help them; and wilt thou not help them when their souls are almost at the fire of hell?” (cited in I.D.E. Thomas, ed., *A Puritan Golden Treasury* [Edinburgh: **Banner of Truth, 1977**], 92–93)

“**Prayers**” refers simply to prayer in general. Unlike “**entreaties**,” in Scripture it is used only in reference to God. It thus carries with it a unique element of worship and reverence. Prayer for the lost is ultimately directed at God as an act of worship, because the salvation of sinners causes them to give glory to Him.

The Greek word [ἔντευξις] “**enteuxis**” translated “**petitions**” comes from a root word meaning “**to fall in with someone.**” The verb form is used to speak of both Christ’s and the Spirit’s intercession for us ([Hebrews 7:25](#); [Romans 8:26](#)).

[Hebrews 7:25 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁵ **Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.**

[Romans 8:26 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁶ **In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;**

They identify with our needs and become involved in our struggles, revealing empathy, sympathy, and compassion. Praying for the lost should never be cold, detached, or impersonal, like a public defender assigned to represent a defendant. Understanding the depths of their misery and pain, and their coming doom, **we must cry to God for the salvation of sinners.**

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“Thanksgivings” is the fourth element in evangelistic prayers. We pray with a spirit of gratitude to God that the Gospel offer has been extended, that we have the privilege of reaching the lost with that Gospel, and that some respond with faith and repentance.

These four nuances enrich our prayers as we pray effectively for the lost. If they are missing, we need to examine our hearts.

- 1) Do we fully realize the desperate condition the lost are in?
- 2) Do we really want to see God glorified by the salvation of souls?
- 3) Do we sympathize with the compelling reality of their lost souls, both for time and eternity?
- 4) Are we thankful the Gospel message is extended to all and for our privilege of sharing it?

If those components are lacking in our hearts **we will be indifferent**. Often we are indifferent simply because we are not obedient to those urgings.