

**Question: Why pray for the lost if God determines who will believe anyway?**

**Answer:** There are several reasons to pray for lost people. First, the Bible urges us to pray for the lost. Paul writes, “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:1-4). This passage points to the priority of prayer for the lost when it says “first of all.” It also demonstrates that God desires believers to be involved in praying for all men to be saved. This is consistent with other Scriptures. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather delights when sinners turn from their evil ways (Ezek 33:11). He has commanded all men to repent (Acts 17:30) and His Gospel is to be preached to every one in the world (Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-47). Therefore, we must pray that every man and every woman responds to the good news since salvation is offered to all (1 Tim 4:10; Titus 2:11; 1 John 4:14; Rev 22:17). Moreover, John wrote, “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him” (1 John 5:14-15).

Secondly, Jesus commands us to pray for the lost. Jesus said, “Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’” (Matt 6:9-10; cf. Luke 11:2). These parallel verses allude to God’s call to intercede for the lost. In the midst of Christ’s command to pray “in this way” we are told to pray for both His present and future reign in people’s lives (i.e., “Your kingdom come”). One application of this call is to pray for Christ to bring about the conversion of lost people. When one prays for the will of God and the kingdom of God, he is in essence praying for the same thing. He is praying for Jesus to rule in the hearts of men and women.

Thirdly, Jesus modeled prayer for the lost. Jesus knew who His elect were, yet He prayed nonetheless that they would believe (John 17:20). We don’t know who the elect are so we should be motivated by Jesus to nonetheless pray that the lost would be found.

Fourthly, Paul modeled praying for the lost. Paul writes, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation” (Rom 10:1). Here, Paul’s desire for the lost to be saved is coupled with prayer for the same. Further evidence that Paul’s heartfelt desire was for the lost to be saved can also be seen in Romans 9:1-3: “I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.” Paul had a personal burden for lost people and so must we.