

“Pray For Me”  
Ephesians 6:18–20  
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I heard a story about a little boy who was a preacher's kid, and he noticed that when his father would be sitting in the chair behind the podium, before the sermon, he would bow his head and close his eyes. The little boy asked him, “What do you do Dad, when you do that?” He said, ‘I'm praying a prayer.’ His son said, “what are you praying?” He said, ‘I pray for God to give me a good sermon.’ The little boy looked at him and thought a moment and said, “Dad, why doesn't God ever answer your prayers.” Children can be brutally honest. So I prayed for a good sermon, but I pray especially that you'll pay attention at the end. I hope you'll stay with me till the end, because I have a very specific application for you.

I heard another story about a man who claimed to be an atheist. We're going to be talking a little bit about evangelism here in this particular sermon. This man didn't believe in God, but he was a construction worker on the top of a big building, about a 25 to 30 foot story building. And he slipped and fell over the edge but as he went over, he grabbed the guttering and he started yelling for his friends to come and help him. But what he didn't know was his friends had gone to the floor below to get some tools, and so there was no one responding to him. The longer he held there, the more tired his arms got, and he finally realized no one was coming. Even though he'd always claimed not to believe in God, he looked up in the sky and says, “Is there anyone up there to help?” This voice came from the sky that said, ‘Yes, do you believe?’ And he said, “Yes, I believe.” The voice said, ‘Do you really believe?’ He said, “Yes, I really believe.” The voice said, ‘Then let go.’ He looked up and said, “Is there anybody else up there to help?”

I tell you that story not just because it's humorous, because it kind of introduces one of the things I want to talk about, and that is that the common issues of life, God's Word gives us answers to them. Unfortunately, according to Romans 1, many people suppress that truth and they don't want God solutions to their problems. They want to do everything their own way. One area that a lot of people struggle with that I want to talk about a good bit in this study is the area of hope. We use the word hope many times like this; I hope my team wins their game this week or I hope my daughter gets a scholarship to college or I hope the diagnosis from my doctor is good or I hope the stock market doesn't crash. But if you think about all those kind of ways that we use the word hope, there's uncertainty. We don't know if these things are going to happen. It's like we're wishfully thinking and hoping that these things might happen.

Most of those are trivial issues, but where can we find hope in a world which is filled with discouragement and disappointments? What about major issues, very important issues? I've heard people say, I hope the war in Israel doesn't become World War III, or I hope our country returns to sanity and Biblical values. I hope there is an afterlife in heaven and that I make it there or I hope I can make some good friends who will genuinely care for me. Just this week I heard about a survey that was done by the Meta Gallup group in 140 countries and they found that nearly one in four people worldwide feel very or fairly lonely. That's a lot of people feeling lonely and research has shown that loneliness is associated with elevated risks of a wide range of physical and emotional health conditions. I find that a lot of people don't know how to make and keep friends and it's because they're so focused on themselves and what others think of them rather than being interested in others. Of course, things like Facebook and Instagram where you just presenting yourself, encourage that and that's not helpful.

I have found that people all around us are going through things that we may not be experiencing, but they're hurting. They're having difficulties. So, during this Advent season, rather than keeping our heads down and focused on all of our Christmas activities, we want to be sensitive to the needs of those around us because there are people that are hurting. There are people that are hopeless. Hope is one of the most powerful of emotions. Many people got through World War II by the hope of being reunited with loved ones, people that were in concentration camps. Hope enables us to live through those kind of hard circumstances and yet, what is hope from a Biblical point of view?

The Christmas card sent out this week from Briarwood has the theme 'a thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices.' I didn't know I was going to be getting that when I planned this message. That theme comes from the song 'O Holy Night' but, to people who are weary in the world, who don't believe in Jesus Christ, they don't have a thrill of hope. They remain weary, so we need to be involved in helping people to know Christ for He is the hope but so many people are not rejoicing. Rather, they are seeking things that don't satisfy. We can expect that many of our neighbors, coworkers, people we meet outside of church that at the after this Christmas season, some of them are going to have a greater lack of hope than they do right now. Some people think that this Christmas season – the parties, the hype, the good vibes, the gifts and all these things are going to lead to some happiness and yet it's not going to provide what they hoped for. That's because only Jesus can provide what we really need.

So, if you have friends or neighbors that demonstrate that after Christmas are a little more depressed now than they were before, you could invite them to a three week study that I know of called Hope Explored, which will give them a Biblical perspective on the subject. If you're interested in that, contact me afterwards. From Hope Explored, I want to read you what they have as their Biblical definition of hope. It says 'hope is a joyful expectation for the future based on true events in the past, which changes everything about my present.' Let's unpack that phrase by phrase.

First, it says 'hope is a joyful expectation for the future.' In other words, as believers, we have something to look forward to and that is the return of Christ or our home going to be with Him if that comes first. So, our future is not bleak. We have something wonderful to look forward to and it's based on true events in the past. This means there are things in the past like the perfect life that Christ lived for us, the death of Christ on the cross, on our behalf, and His resurrection. Those things guarantee our own life forever. They are historical events. Then the last phrase is 'which changes everything about my present.' In other words, if we believe those first two things, if we believe that there is a future hope for us and it's based on facts that really happen, things that actually happen in history with Jesus Christ, then it cannot but impact the way we think and the way we live right now. In a way hope changes nothing in our circumstances, but it changes everything in our perspective. That's good news; which is what the gospel is – Good News.

So, let's look at how Biblical hope can help us reach out to others at Christmas who are without hope. Pastor Reeder used to always tell us that conversion happens in a moment but evangelism is a process that leads to conversion, and that process can sometimes take quite a while. It could be days, could be weeks, could be months, could be years. Later on I'm going to tell you some stories to illustrate how that process works with different people.

There are different ways that people in our world look at the world right now and one is that they feel like things are getting worse. A lot of people feel that way. I hear it especially among Christians. Some people say things are getting better. Some say things go round and

round in a circle of life which is really a Hindu view of the world and of life. Some say that things are simply random. There's no purpose to them, which not very comforting. But the Christian worldview is different. It's linear – beliefs where there's a beginning and an end. There was a creation, there was a fall, there was redemption by Christ, and there will be a restoration. We have something to look forward to. The history is actually under the control of a loving and sovereign God, and that also is very good news.

Think about this on a more personal level than looking at the big picture. Where is your life going? Is it founded on Jesus Christ and the eternal truths He and His apostles taught? Isaiah 9:2 says [2] *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.* There are people living in darkness at the time that this was written by Isaiah, 500 years before Christ and God sent Jesus into the world. He is the Light of the world that brings hope.

Now think about this. Have you ever tried to sell something to someone they don't want? When I played baseball as a youth one time to raise funds for the league, we were all given the assignment to go out and sell something. It was something I knew very little about and apparently something that most people didn't want. At least I was not successful for I didn't make one sale and I hated every bit of it. I decided right then I would never be a salesman, but I was trying to get people to buy things that they seemed to not want, even though I spent a lot of time on it. So how would you like to try to convince someone to do a terrible job with no pay? Or how would you like to try to convince someone to be a human guinea pig for experimentation? You're going to inject them with cancer cells so you could try some experimental drugs on them, yet both of those examples are ridiculous and they're supposed to be ridiculous.

The reason I use them is because I think that sometimes we as Christians have the viewpoint that talking to people about Christ is a similar thing. It's almost like we feel that telling them about Jesus is like inflicting some great harm on them, that we're asking them to accept something that's going to be terrible for them, and nothing could be farther from the truth. We might say things like, 'You wouldn't be interested in hearing about Jesus, would you?' We just assume that people are not interested. The fact is, God is at work and because God is at work in people's hearts, He's in that process of making people who weren't interested, and what we have to offer them is Good News, not bad news, not harm, but Good News.

In the book of Ephesians, Paul has told us something about the condition of people without Christ where he describes what they were like before they were Christians. He said that they were dead because of their trespasses and sins and that would be spiritually dead towards God. He said they were following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – that would be Satan that they were following. He said they were living in the passions of the flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. In other words, we're all in the same boat for all mankind without Christ are destined for wrath. He also tells them that they were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. That's his description of people without Christ in his day – having no hope without God in the world and all those other things.

So, what's changed? Nothing has changed. The people we meet today without Christ, that's the description of them as well. They're all those things that he wrote about to the Ephesians. It's the same thing. They need Jesus. What does it mean to have no hope? If you were

to ask the average person, maybe in your extended family or to some person on the street, and you were to imply to them that because of what I read the Bible, I know that you have no hope. What kind of response might you get? Some people would say, 'Of course I have hope.' Others might say, "I don't have much hope unless our government does something big to change things because we'll be doomed otherwise." I think a lot of people in their hearts don't have much hope and it shows in the ways that they seek to find it. They look to their bank accounts, accumulating money or their stock investments, or to the use of drugs or sex or alcohol or entertainment. Entertainment is a big one. Our nation is just consumed with entertainment and I think for many people, that's their escape. That's what they try to do to avoid the hopelessness of life without Christ. Only occasionally will a person be honest enough to tell you of their anxieties and lack of hope.

I had this experience early in my time in South Africa. I was working on a campus and my colleague had an hour free. We'd been talking and praying and we said, let's just go find some student that is sitting around doing nothing and try to share the Gospel. We prayed and we turned around and they're standing, leaning against a wall about 15 or 20 yards away was a young redheaded student standing there by himself. So, we walked over to him and started conversation. We said, "we'd like to talk to you if you got a few minutes about Jesus." He looked kind of surprised and said, 'okay.' We went through the Gospel with him and when we got to the end he said he was very interested in receiving Christ, and it was so easy that it was as if we had had done a set up in a training session where we told the person, say this and say that. This student was just following right in line like he had been told what to say. I ask him, 'why are you so eager for this?' He said, "I'm a freshman student and I'm still trying to find my way. About a week ago, I just felt really hopeless and directionless. I do believe in God so I prayed to ask God to send someone to me to help me. So when you walked up and said you wanted to talk about God, I saw that as from God." That day he committed his life to Christ.

I've been doing this evangelism now for 51 years, sharing the Gospel and just engaging people in spiritual conversations and what I just described with that fellow, Rob, that kind of experience has only happened to me a few times. For most people it's a process and most of them are not going to be as honest as he was but that was a wonderful experience. People are often hurting, but rarely do they want to admit it. They do know that their life is incomplete. They just don't know why.

Towards the end of our time in South Africa, I met a man named Mark. He was a young business man around 30 who came to a businessmen's breakfast that we had every Friday morning. We would use that breakfast to invite men who didn't know Christ. We would have a short talk, and then we would sit around tables and discuss the content of the talk and their own real life issues and then we would use that as a way to meet people. So my intention was then after the meeting, I would meet the guest and I would offer to meet with them sometime personally. This guy Mark came up to me after the meeting and said, "This was very interesting. You and I should talk about spiritual things sometime." I was thinking, 'That's my line, you're not supposed to say that' but since he was interested, I said, "Sure."

Mark and I met the next week and I pulled out the little booklet called The Four Spiritual Laws and I went through it with him word by word. I discussed it with him. We got to the end of it and he said, "I've never heard this before. I know my parents took me to Sunday school when I was little, but I said, I don't think I've been since I was five years old. This is totally new to me. Could you let me have this booklet so I could take it home and think about it and discuss it with my wife?" I said, 'Of course' for I had planned on giving it to him anyway. Mark went home,

and after about three or four weeks of coming to our meetings, he came up to me and said, "I just want you to know that this week I prayed the prayer in that little booklet and committed my life to Christ and so did my wife." It took a few weeks, but it was a process for him learning and coming to Christ.

Right around that same time I met a man named Philip, who was a car dealer, and Philip was attending with his wife, a family life marriage seminar that my wife, Jan and I were teaching. We had a session on conflict resolution and after the teaching, we would let the couples sit together and talk about what the topic was. So they were going to talk about conflict and we tried to stay away from them because we wanted people to be able to have their own conversation as a couple, but I noticed this guy that I didn't know waving me over to where he was. So I went over there and he said, "My wife and I don't really have conflict in our marriage" and of course, my first thought was 'liar' but I didn't say anything. I thought, I'll listen to what he has to say. He then said, "We've talked through things and we get most things worked out but we have one conflict that is pretty big that we've never been able to resolve." I said, 'What is that?' He said, "she's a Christian and I'm not that well." That's a pretty big conflict. We had a short conversation and I said, 'let's talk about this later' so I let them go.

About a month later, I called him up and said, "Hey, Phillip, I'm going to be having a Bible study at my home for four weeks on a Monday night and it's all about who Jesus is and why He came. Would you be willing to come to that?" He said, 'Yes, I'll come.' So he came along with some other men, and the first thing I did was I said, "Let's go around and have everyone introduce themselves." So Phillip happened to be the first one and he said, 'I'm Phillip and I'm a used car dealer and they don't call us Alibaba and the forty thieves for nothing. I'm here because my wife is a Christian and she thinks I'm going to hell so to get her off my back, I told her I'd go to this Bible study and check it all out.' Phillip sat through the four weeks of the Bible study. At the end of it, I had a series of questions to ask the people to see if they understood what we'd been talking about. So, when I asked him who Jesus was he gave me a perfect answer. Then when I asked him why Jesus came he gave the perfect answer. Then I asked him what the death of Christ was about. He gave the perfect answer. You would think he was theologically trained just from this little Bible study.

I thought, okay, I have a live one here so I said to Phillip, 'So would you like to receive Christ?' He said, "No." I said, 'Why not?' He said, "Because I've seen what happens to people who become Christians. God changes their lives, and I don't want my life to change. I like my life the way it is." What do you do with a person like that? Do you just say, 'well, he's not one of the elect, he's going to hell?' No, you keep after him. So Phillip became a friend. I discovered that he liked baseball and that was very unusual in South Africa because they were primarily a cricket nation, but not baseball. I probably hadn't watched a baseball game in 20 years, although I played baseball. So I immediately wrote to my dad in America and asked him to make some videos of some baseball games and send them to me, which he did. That gave me a reason to sit down with Phillip and watch a game together and talk and be able to talk about the Lord. We didn't always talk about the Lord, but we did have some quite a few and that went on for a year and a half. After a year and a half he called me up one day and he said, 'I made the commitment to Christ.' It took a while, but God was at work in his life and we need to be aware of that. Sometimes it doesn't take so long.

Back in June, I was on a medical mission trip with CMMA in the Dominican Republic. The way our trips work is people go through our medical clinic and then they come and sit down with me, a student and a translator, and we talk to them about Jesus. I saw this couple coming

towards me from the clinic where we were sitting outside, and it was an older man, looked like he was 75 or 80 and he had a cane. The way he was using it made me think he's probably blind and his daughter had him by the arm and was helping him. She was probably 50 or 60, I don't know. They came and sat down and we saw he was blind. We started talking and I asked the man, "Who would you say Jesus is?" He said, 'He's an angel.' I asked his daughter, "Who would you say Jesus is?" She said, 'Yeah, He's an angel.'

So, what did I do? I turned over to Hebrews 1:5 where it says [5] *For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"?* We talked about it for a few minutes, what it meant. Then I read Hebrews 1:6 which says [6] *And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."* So rather than being an angel, the angels worship Him. Hebrews 1:8 says [8] *But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. So God calls Jesus God. So after talking about that for, I don't know, maybe 10 minutes, they said they understood it now – that's who Jesus is. I said to them "Then what do you need to do about that?" They said, 'we need Jesus as our Savior' and they prayed and asked Christ to come into their lives. It happened very quick in their case.*

With all of that having been said, I want draw your attention to the passage for this study in Ephesians 6 where Paul writes a lot about the spiritual warfare in which we're engaged to help us as Christians cope with a spiritual battle. I want to focus on the fact that this spiritual battle is also raging to keep the unbelievers from believing the Good News. In fact, it says in one of Paul's other letters, II Corinthians 4:4, referring to unbelievers [4] *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* In other words, Satan is trying to blind the eyes of unbelievers so they don't understand the truth of the Gospel.

One man who understood this very well was C.S. Lewis. He wrote a book called The Screwtape Letters. In that book, the idea is that one demon is writing to another demon, and they're talking about how they can trip Christians up and how they can keep Christians from believing the Gospel. So, whenever they refer to the enemy, they're talking about our God because these are demons. I want to read you a little excerpt from one of the letters in the book where one demon is writing to another. He says this; "The humans live in time, but our enemy (referring to God) destines them to eternity. Therefore, he wants them to attend chiefly to two things; to eternity itself and to that point of time, which they call the present for the present is the point at which time touches eternity. He would therefore have them continually concerned, either with eternity, which means being concerned with Him or with the present, meditating on their eternal union with Himself or their separation from Himself."

So Paul writes in regard to this spiritual battle that's going on and he asks for the Ephesians to pray and that picks us up in Ephesians 6:18-20 which says [18] *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, [19] and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel, [20] for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.* Let's unpack this a little bit.

In Ephesians 6:18 he asks for prayer and supplication and to that end, for that purpose, keep alert, keeping alert. Don't let your guard down. That's very important. We know that's important in wartime, because people who are not alert in wartime get killed. I knew a guy where

that happened to him. He was the sergeant and he wasn't alert. He didn't post a guard because he thought there were no enemy around and that night, the enemy came in and killed eight of his men because he was not alert. We need to be alert to the spiritual battle that's going on around us. In that same verse he says, 'making supplication for all the saints,' in other words, as we face the spiritual battle, let's don't just think about ourselves and the battle we're going through. Let's think about others, people around us, our Christian friends. They are also experiencing a spiritual battle and we need to be praying for them.

Then in Ephesians 6:19 Paul has that little phrase and 'also for me.' What does he mean by that? He means also pray for me (Paul). He's telling them to pray for the saints and pray specifically for him. What does he want us to pray about for him? 'That words may be given to me and opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel.' The title of our sermon is *Pray for Me*. Paul is asking them to pray for him to have boldness? Paul? I mean, have you read the New Testament and the things Paul did? They were phenomenal. He didn't seem to need any boldness. He seemed to go where angels fear to tread. He was an amazing evangelist and church planter, and yet he saw the need to have his brothers and sisters in Ephesus pray for him. He acknowledges his need for boldness to open his mouth and talk to people about Christ. If Paul needed prayer for boldness, boy, do I ever and so do you.

In Ephesians 6:19 he says he's an ambassador in chains. So even though he was writing this from prison, he still saw himself as representing the Lord in prison, wherever he was. The same goes for us. It doesn't matter where you are in life, whatever you're doing each day, you are a representative of the Lord and Paul says 'that they would pray, that he would speak as I ought to speak.' We need that as well. We ought to speak God's Word to people. At Briarwood, we have many opportunities for people to hear the Gospel, especially at the Advent season. We just had Christmas at the Caroline House, and it was a phenomenal event and again many people heard the Gospel. Coming up we have the walk-through Nativity where the Gospel is clearly presented. We have the Briarwood Ballet. We have the Briarwood Christmas Festival, which features the choir and the orchestra. We have all these opportunities for people to be able to hear the Gospel.

I think we need to think through who to invite to the different kind of events and how to do it, how to invite them and what I find helpful is to begin with a question. Questions are disarming. When you make statements to people like, "hey, I know you, you really need to come to this event" that can come across kind of preachy and condemning but questions show you want to hear what they have to say. You want to involve them in a conversation. It shows an interest in the other person and it leads to further conversation. Some years ago I asked a young man that I knew at UAB who was not a Christian if he liked classical music, and I had a little hint that he might, but I wanted to make sure. So, I started with the question "Do you like classical music?" He said, 'Yes, I love it.' So, I said "Coming up at Christmas, we have this festival and there'll be an orchestra there and they'll be the choir." I told him what was going on and he was there. He came and he came the next year and he came to the spring concert. He came to three or four of these over a period of three years before he came to faith in Christ. Now he's walking with the Lord, living in another city. So, think about who you're talking to and what's the best way to reach out to them.

Recently, we had a man doing some remodeling work in our house that started because of a water leak. I asked him a simple question that someone had suggested to me just a couple of weeks ago and here's the question, 'Do you celebrate Christmas?' Now, that's a nice, non-offensive, neutral question, especially here in the South and at this time of the year. There's a lot

of ways people could respond to that. I asked another man who had also come to do some work on our house the same question, and he immediately said, "Oh, if I wasn't getting the presents ready for Christmas, my kids would be all upset with me." So he had one thing in his mind about Christmas and that was the gifts. People might say, 'Yeah, we put up lights. Yeah, we get the family together, we give gifts.' That might be a way to respond to a simple question like that. Some people might say, 'I don't know if it's a celebration or just a commercial enterprise that keeps us all busy and spends our money.' That would be a bit of a cynical view but there are probably people that think that. Some might say, 'yes, it's a great time to focus on Jesus coming into the world for me.'

There's a lot of ways people could respond to a simple question like that but when I asked this man who was working on our house, 'Do you celebrate Christmas?' He said, "Nah, to me, it's like believing in the Easter Bunny. It's just a bunch of made up stories." So, what do you do with that? Is that the end of the conversation? It doesn't have to be. We did talk about it a little bit and we need to follow that up.

Here's another question which I got out of the book, *Questioning Evangelism*, which is a very good book. He said, "begin a question with people who have objections like this man did with these three words, 'isn't it possible?' And then you add to that, isn't it possible...what? Isn't it possible that the information you've been given about Jesus is false? Isn't it possible that there are some facts about Jesus that maybe you don't know? So we can ask questions like that, which is what I did. I asked him some questions like that and it furthered the conversation. What I decided to do with him was, that when he finished the work at my house and left, I gave him a Christmas present. I gave him a little book titled Is Christmas Unbelievable. This book answers some of the common questions that people have about Christmas. Like, was Jesus even a real person? That's one of the chapters. Another chapter answers, can we take the Gospels seriously? How can you believe in a virgin birth and what does it matter? When he got home and saw what I'd given him, he sent me a text that said, 'I will absolutely read it. That's a very thoughtful gift.' He's not a Christian yet, but boy, if he reads this book, he's going to hear the Gospel and he's going to hear the historical facts about who Jesus is and what He did. So, each person is a little bit different.

My first year with Campus Group was 48 and a half years ago and I had to write a newsletter around Christmas time. Not knowing what to write, I remembered that we had just finished reading J.I Packer's book Knowing God. In his chapter called God Incarnate interestingly he says a lot of people stumble over issues like how can we believe in a virgin birth or how can we believe that Jesus rose from the dead or how can we believe that He killed people, that He walked on water, etc.? So how can you believe that? Here's what Packer says; "In fact, the real difficulty, the supreme mystery with which the Gospel confronts us, does not lie here at all, not in those miracles. It lies not in the Good Friday message of atonement, nor in the Easter message or resurrection, but in the Christmas message of incarnation. The really staggering Christian claim is that Jesus of Nazareth was God made man." That's the message that we have to share with people. That is wonderful news. God became a Man for us.

I put that little paragraph in my newsletter at Christmas time and when I came back to Birmingham about six months later, there was one of the one of the couples that were on my newsletter list, the wife was a Christian, and the husband wasn't. When I went to see them, he said, "I read that Christmas letter of yours and that really got me thinking. I'd never thought about that. The idea that the biggest miracle is God became a Man." Then I went off back to my assignment and moved to South Africa but I heard through other mutual friends that about three

years later, this man became a Christian. Sometimes we just start a process with people which is what we need to do, and it gives us humility to realize it's not what we do, it's what God is doing in people's lives. That's good news that Jesus died for us and that's the good news we have to share at the Advent season.

When I'm talking to people about Christmas and about coming to our events, I'm not trying to start an argument to try to win to prove that I'm right and they're wrong. No, what I'm trying to do is just start a conversation. I find that when I start a conversation you can tell by their response whether they're interested or not, and if they're not interested, move on to someone else, but if they are, then continue to conversation. It's as simple as that. So, one of the things I've observed is that we have a lot of Christmas activities which are designed for outreach, but the majority of the people who come to them are Christians and what we need to be doing is getting the people who are Christians to come to those events, right?

So here is a very specific application for you. Paul wrote in Romans 7:8-9, [18] *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.* [19] *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.* Is Paul the only one like that? No, that's a common problem, isn't it? We have good intentions, but it doesn't always translate into the right actions. We don't always do what we wish we did. So I have a very specific application for you. I want you to ask someone, not your spouse, someone else, to pray for you. That's the theme of our message today. Pray for me. Ask them to pray for you. What are you going to ask them to pray about? Ask them to pray for you and hold you accountable by asking you each week of Advent, 'have you started a spiritual conversation?' Very simple. I know who I'm going to ask already and that's my brother. He's going to hold me accountable every week. He's going to ask me that because every week I want to be talking to at least one person starting a spiritual conversation with the hope that it goes further and that I can invite them to something here at Briarwood.

How do you start that conversation? I would suggest you use that simple question that I talked about earlier. Do you celebrate Christmas? Because it's a non-offensive question so start with that. If they say 'yes' then follow it up with 'how do you celebrate Christmas? What's it about?' Just follow up with some other questions and see what God does. My prayer is that God will create an interest in the people that you are talking to and that would be the start of a process for them. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord, give us opportunities over these next few weeks during the Advent time to make use of this time of all the things that go on, all the mentions of Jesus, the songs that are sung, the decorations and everything else. Help us use these things as opportunities to begin conversations with people. Give us boldness. Help us pray for one another and encourage one another to be doing these things. God, would You use us to bring a great harvest this Advent? I'm aware that there may be people reading this today who actually don't know You, who don't have the hope of knowing that Christ is coming for them again and so if you're in that situation, I would ask you to pray like this; 'Lord Jesus, I need the hope that You offer. I need the forgiveness of sins that You offer. Come into my life and change me to be like You,' in Jesus' Name, Amen.