

In many places of our world, it's common knowledge that Jesus died a miserable death by crucifixion. But merely knowing some facts about His death and resurrection does not move people to welcome Christ as Lord of their lives. It takes more than talk. The word of the cross by itself is foolishness. But when God's Spirit is at work, that word can come through with power. This is why it's important to pray for God's Spirit to be at work when people are confronted with the crucifixion of Jesus. This issue of FreshPrayer will help you focus your praying for God's work in the lives of particular people who have yet to follow Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:18

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1. For God to reverse their story: From perishing to being saved. (1:28)

Consider the ramifications of 1 Corinthians 1:28. In every person's life, one of two things is taking place: Either that person is perishing or that person is being saved. It's as if people are either moving in one direction or the other on a highway. Either the events and decisions move people steadily toward waste and ruin, or God somehow brings about a "U turn", so people can recognize and follow Christ. Turning and following Christ can sometimes be a lengthy process. Pray that God will do what only He can do: to turn people's hearts by His Spirit so that the idea of Jesus dying for them is no longer foolish or offensive, but the most precious and astounding thing they've ever known.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

*¹ ...I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.
² For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.
³ I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,
⁴ and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,
⁵ so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.*

2. For God to bring message-bearing people to be with them (2:1-5)

God prefers that the word of the cross be conveyed, not by powerful marketing or smothering propaganda techniques, but instead by people who simply know the crucified and risen Jesus. Pray for God to bring people into the life story of particular people who have yet to know Christ.

- **To be "with" them (vss 1, 3).** God doesn't require that people hear the gospel in church buildings by eloquent ordained ministers. Pray that God brings people, who are nothing more than broken but sincere believers, to linger in the lives of those you are praying for.
- **For the demonstration of God's Spirit (vs 4).** By the interaction of ordinary people who have been changed by Jesus, God displays how genuine and powerful His transforming love can be. Pray that God would demonstrate His love and power in undeniable ways.

3. For Christ to be known and trusted, not merely talked about (vss 2, 5)

God wants the crucified and risen Jesus to be encountered, recognized, and experienced. In short, God wants Jesus Himself to be known. As people encounter the cross, pray that they would come to faith in Jesus, utterly entrusting themselves to His Lordship in all His saving power.

There has been a great deal of anticipation about the movie "The Passion of the Christ." While the presentation of Jesus' death is unquestionably impactful, no one questions the importance of praying for the people who will encounter this, or any other presentation of the death of Jesus. The question is, what do we pray for people who encounter such a vivid articulation of the death and resurrection of Jesus? This leader's guide will help you facilitate a prayer session for those who have yet to follow Christ.

1. Talk about the word of the cross and the work of the Spirit.

Before you pray, help participants think about what they want to ask God to do. Have them compare 1 Corinthians 1:18 with 2:4-5 to take note of the interplay of the word of the cross and the work of God's Spirit. (Helpful homework for the leader: You'll find it enormously helpful to examine 2:6-16 carefully before the prayer time, particularly verse 13. You'll find that God's Spirit infuses His work alongside our efforts to articulate His word.) Guide participants in a short discussion. They will have no problem coming to a fresh recognition that the message of the cross, apart from the work of God's Spirit, will remain an absurdity or an offensive episode of gratuitous violence.

2. Guide short "rounds" of prayer.

It usually works best to break large groups into smaller prayer huddles of three or four people. Have each person identify someone they know who has yet to follow Christ. Allow a few minutes for each "round" of prayer. Don't be hesitant to interrupt the session with promptings to move on to another person or topic.

- **Ask God to reverse the course of people's lives: from perishing to being saved.**

We can't really know which way people are moving in their lives. Some who are being saved send signals that they don't want anything to do with Jesus. But it's appropriate to simply ask God to reverse the story in anyone's life. By God's work the word of the cross can come alive with power. You might want to reference 1 Corinthians 2:12-14 if this seems fitting.

- **Ask God to send people to be "with" them.** Read vs 4 and 5 aloud. Ask God to bring believers into their lives who are filled with wonder and awe at the cross of Christ. Have your prayers match Paul's self-description, as one who did not come with superiority of any kind, but instead his humility left room for God to work in remarkable ways.

- **Ask God to demonstrate His power.** Pray that God would put His love on display, so that the huge reality of Christ's substitutionary death would be confirmed.

- **Ask God to bring about an encounter.** In verse 2 the word "know" is used in a way that means much more than intellectually agreeing with a message. This kind of knowing refers to experiencing and encountering a living Jesus who was crucified. This kind of knowing has a measure of recognition of why Jesus died, and that His death was somehow for them. You might draw attention to verse the reference to faith in verse 5. This kind of faith is definitely not a mere assent to historical facts. This faith is an encounter with Jesus.