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**Target Persons of Prayer - Part 3: The Unsaved Lost**

By Tal Davis

One of my favorite baseball players was Yogi Berra of the New York Yankees. I am old enough to actually recall seeing him play a few times on television when I was a boy and read a biography of his life. It was quite a story. He was maybe the greatest catcher of all time. He was also a successful manager of both the Yankees and the New York Mets. And beyond that, he starred in series of AFLACK TV commercials.

Perhaps Yogi's greatest legacy, though, was his tendency to make funny statements (malapropisms or "Yogi-isms"). Here are a few such alleged Yogi Berra quotes:

- "A nickel ain't worth a dime anymore."
- "Baseball is ninety percent mental. The other half is physical."
- "If people don't want to come out to the ball-park, how are you going to stop them?"
- "It ain't the heat, it's the humility."
- "You can observe a lot just by watching."
- The city of L.A.: "It gets late early out there."
- "It's like deja vu all over again."
- A specific hotel: "The towels were so thick there I could hardly close my suitcase."
- A certain restaurant: "Nobody goes there anymore because it's too crowded."
- "You should always go to other people's funerals, otherwise, they won't come to yours."
- "It ain't over 'til it's over."
- Then, simultaneously denying and confirming his reputation, Berra once stated, "I really didn't say everything I said."

One of his best was, "When you come to the fork in the road - take it!" Well, Yogi wasn't talking

about it, but people all come to the fork in the road of life, and when they do they must choose whether or not to follow God. The truth is, people without Christ are lost, both in this life and for eternity.

Before we go further, we need to define what we mean by "lost." The lost, in this context, are those people who do not have a knowledge of Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. That is to say, they have not confessed and repented of their sins and asked God to forgive them based on the finished work of Jesus by His sacrificial death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. This is what is called being "born-again." Anyone who has not had that experience is spiritually and eternally "lost." They are dead in their sins now in this life and will live eternally separated from God after death.

So what exactly is the state of "lostness" in America? When I was with the North American Mission Board our research team estimated (and this was about 20 years ago) that there were at least 260 million people without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in America. That's more lost people than the entire population of Russia. The current population of the United States is about 331 million.

This is the third and final installment of a three part series entitled "Target Persons of Prayer." In Part one we focused on why and how we can pray for ourselves. The second part was praying for our fellow believers in Christ. You can read those articles at these links

<http://www.marketfaith.org/2023/07/target-persons-of-prayer-part-1-pray-for-yourself-tal-davis/> and

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<http://www.marketfaith.org/2023/07/target-persons-of-prayer-part-2-our-fellow-believers-tal-davis/>.

So we will deal with two questions in this third installment. First, should we actually pray for the lost? Second, how should we pray for the lost?

So, should we target the lost for our prayers? I remember years ago hearing a prominent Bible teacher say that the Bible does not teach that we should ever pray for the lost. His rationale was that God already had determined who would be saved, and that our prayers would not make any difference. And while it is true that bringing people to Christ is purely the work of God through His Holy Spirit, I find nowhere in Scripture where it limits our prayers in asking Him to send the Spirit to work in a specific person's life. Even Jesus prayed for those who had not yet come to Him. Consider the following.

In John's gospel, he recorded Jesus' discourse and prayer leading up to His crucifixion in chapters 16 and 17. As we saw in our previous installments how He prayed both for Himself and His disciples. But He also prayed for those who would become believers in the future. At one point, He tells His followers that the Holy Spirit (the Paracletos/the Helper) would come to empower them and to convict the unbelieving world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

*"7 But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. 8 And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me;"* (John 16:7-9 NASB)

He also prayed for those whom would later come to believe in Him through the preaching of His disciples in the future.

*20 "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me."* (John 17:20-21 NASB)

So yes, we should pray for the unsaved lost, by name when possible. Which leads us to how we should pray. Clearly we should pray that the Holy Spirit will convict their hearts and draw them to Christ. Of course, we know that the ultimate decision must rest with the individual to receive or not receive Jesus as his Savior. Nonetheless, our prayers can be effective in breaking down the barriers of resistance people build.

The great Christian writer Oswald Chambers (1874-1917) was known to call lost people "worldlings." He said, "Never have the idea that a worldling is unhappy. A worldling is perfectly happy, as thoroughly happy as a Christian." Chambers' point was that most people who are lost don't know they are lost – and don't care. They just go merrily along through life finding whatever happiness they can however they can. That's one reason why prayer is so important. We must pray that the unsaved will see their need for salvation. It's not easy to pray that someone will have to suffer or have a crisis in life to become conscious of the Holy Spirit's prodding, but sometimes that's what it takes. It may take what might be called godly sorrow. As Paul told the Corinthians:

*9 I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that*

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*you might not suffer loss in anything through us. 10 For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. (2 Corinthians 7:9-10 NASB)*

So we pray for the lost that he be convicted of his sin and led to make a decision for Christ. But he must then make the decision! So we should pray that he will choose to follow Jesus. We know that God desires for all people to come to Him. The gospel is open to all. Jesus Himself declared:

*"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16 NASB)*

The Apostle Peter stated:

*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9 NASB)*

Nonetheless, this prayer for the lost to be saved is the one prayer that God cannot guarantee will be answered. He will not force people to receive Him. His Spirit will prod a person to see his or her need and convict them of their sin, but each person must choose individually to take the right road of sal-

vation when they comes to the fork of decision.

So how can you target pray for the lost? There are several specific things you can do.

1. Make a list of lost friends and family that you know (if you are not sure about someone, list them anyway). I suggest you keep your list confidential between yourself and God.

2. Then pray for them often by name asking God to draw them to Himself by His Holy Spirit. Pray He will work in their life and circumstances to break down any barriers that may exist. They may have intellectual issues, had negative experiences in churches, or had bad role models of Christians. We don't always know why some people are resistant to the gospel.

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3. Then, of course, pray they will make the right decision, remembering that it is up to them to decide. You cannot force or cajole a person into the Kingdom of God if they don't want to go. To borrow a phrase from Yogi, "If people don't want to come to Christ, how are you going to stop them?"

4. Finally, you can share your faith with them. This probably should be principle number one. Tell them about Jesus and explain the gospel. It may be as easy as saying the Romans Road or Four Spiritual Laws. But, if they come from a totally different worldview you may have to start from a different place. Freddy Davis' and my new book *Shattering the Truth Mirage* was written just for that purpose – to help people share their faith across those difficult worldview barriers.

Go here to order to order your copy: <https://leadershipbooks.com/products/shattering-the-truth-mirage?variant=45132267684154>

In any case, keep targeting your prayers. God wants to hear from you, and the more you communicate with Him, the more He will communicate with you.