

PRAYER *Leads to* CARE

Opening Ways to **SHARE** *the Gospel*



Steve Sjogren pioneered the modern outward-focused, serving church movement more than 30 years ago while planting The Cincinnati Vineyard. Steve has worked with churches in many communities across the country, developing and presenting ways for ordinary believers to demonstrate kindness in order to show God's love in a practical way. Steve has developed many proven resources, among them the book, *Conspiracy of Kindness*. He is a sought-after conference speaker and leadership coach, training many in servant evangelism workshops. He's considered by many to be the father of servant evangelism.

Find Sjogren's resources and ideas at www.kindness.com.

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Find Hawthorne's resources at www.waymakers.org.



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by **Steve Sjogren** and **Steve Hawthorne**

WayMakers





God's persistent kindness

When did God begin to do good things in your life? Did good things begin to take place only after you became a Christian?

Actually, the Bible is very clear about God doing good things in people's lives long before they even know about Him. There's a story of kindness in every person's life. God delights in showing His premeditated, forever love with tangible acts of kindness. Here's why: The Bible says that "the kindness of God leads you to repentance" (Romans 2:4).

God's kindness never coerces us. Instead, His goodness "leads" us through the events of our lives to the point where we can turn, or repent. God will never force people to turn around. We have to do our own turning.

Follow God's great desire. God is motivated with unstoppable passion to regain relationship with people. He deeply "desires" that "all people" would "come to the knowledge of the truth" about Him (1 Timothy 2:4). Knowing the truth about God can open a relationship with Him. That's what being "saved" is all about.

Co-work with God. Because of His constant desire for every single person to know Him, God gives us two simple but powerful ways to work with Him:

- 1. Pray for every person.** God wants us to pray for every person. "First of all, I urge that...prayers, petitions and thanksgiving be made on behalf of all people" (1 Timothy 2:1).
- 2. Convey and display the message with perfect timing.** God gives us opportunity to make clear the message about Jesus with divine timing, "the testimony [to be] given in its proper time" (1 Timothy 2:6).

Our part isn't hard.

Caring prayers, tangible kindness and well-timed words

Why pray at all? Because there's joy in it. God doesn't need our prayers in order to act. He doesn't really need our efforts to serve people. But He does want us to experience the joy of co-working with Him (and with others who are praying with us!) in bringing new life to others. As you keep attentive to what God may be doing, don't be surprised if God opens opportunities for you to express His love in tangible ways.

Pray along with what God is already doing. Since God's work is always a story, your best praying will be part of an ongoing story. Instead of using prayer as a quick-fix procedure that supposedly gets results if performed correctly, your prayer is a way of collaborating with God.

God is already on the move. Prayer does not push God to get started. He's already doing good things in everyone's life. And He desires to do even better things. Instead of holding off the worst, think of your prayers as asking God to bring on the best.

Persistent, life-giving **prayer** for others leads to opportunities to **care**, displaying God's love, which opens the way to **share** the gospel, declaring God's love.

A simple sequence: Prayer-Care-Share

On the following pages, we offer some proven ideas for how you can pray for others. As you pay attention and take notice of what God may be doing in their lives, you'll often find that there are simple ways for you to do small acts of kindness that can reveal God's great love. Putting God's love on display often opens ways to present the gospel with sensitivity and clarity.





Life-giving prayer

Pray your way into their story

There's a story rolling in everyone's life. God has done and will do good things in people's lives. He does good things long before anyone opens their life to Christ.

Praying for people is the simplest way I know to start seeing them from God's point of view—to notice what they're facing or to get a hunch about what God may have underway.

It's the kindness of God that leads anyone to repentance (Romans 2:4). Meeting, following and serving Christ is always a lifelong story. The typical stories have multiple encounters and experiences that turn people closer to or further from Christ. Someone researching effective ways to lead people to Christ found that most people have no less than five significant encounters in which the message of the gospel registers at the heart level.

As we connect with people in practical ways, those deep heart connections increase rapidly. I love to assume that God is on the verge of doing something good in the lives of everyone I see in order to bring about yet one more significant encounter with His love. I enjoy getting in on the story by praying my way, or "noticing" my way into what God may be up to next.



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Prayerwalk

to get in step with what God is doing

When we live at too fast a pace, we can miss God's invitations to become part of the story He's unfolding in people's lives. Prayerwalking is a way to slow down and begin to naturally pick up on the concerns of God. His heart begins to merge with ours. We allow what causes Him excitement or anguish to affect us in the same way.

Prayerwalking is praying near the people you are praying for, in the places where they live or work. Prayerwalking isn't really about walking around. It's praying with your eyes and heart wide open so you can take notice of what God may be wanting to do in their lives. You can pray quietly with your eyes open without people necessarily knowing that you are praying for them. Be on the scene without making one.



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What to pray

You don't have to have an official "prayer request" to start praying creatively. Try praying in these three ways:

- 1. Thank your way into God's story.** How has God provided, protected or guided them? We're told to offer "thanksgiving on behalf of all people" (1 Timothy 2:1). When you think about it, it's not hard to do. What you're doing is "noticing" what God may be doing. Such "noticing" makes it easier to pray and easier to see what part God may give you in what's coming next.
- 2. Notice what they may be facing.** What fears, pain or ambitions are driving them? What relationships or disappointments have paralyzed them? What turmoil or crisis may be overwhelming them? Pray accordingly.
- 3. Pray with scripture.** Check out the passages of scripture in the side margins of the pages throughout this booklet. Many of them can give you ideas about what you can pray.





Practical ways to care

From noticing to nudging

A small kindness can show great love

As you pray for others, “noticing” what God is doing in their lives, you allow God to point out needs as well as opportunities. It’s as if He is “noticing” through you.

Often, those needs work as your cue that it’s your time to play a bit part in the story. In the flow of what is unfolding in people’s lives, God uses small acts of kindness to reveal the great love of Christ.

Kindness is never accidental. It’s always intentional. Get creative.

Team up with others. Dream up ways to serve people in small, tangible ways. You might call it committing acts of non-random kindness.

Many fear sharing the gospel because they think that they’ll have to be pushy. No one likes pushy people. So don’t be pushy. Instead of pushing, your act of kindness may “nudge” them closer to the time when they will open their life to Christ. Those around me are gaining courage as they see how uncomplicated it all is. Just show God’s love in small ways and see where it goes.



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Demonstrate

God’s love in a practical way

Nudging people with God’s love can be done thousands of ways. It’s God’s love. You don’t have to feel it. Just find some simple way to display the smallest kindness. I define it this way: Demonstrate the kindness of God by offering to do some act of humble service with no strings attached.

For people near you who know you

Show your concern naturally by doing “golden rule” kindness: Do something for others that you are already going to do for yourself. Almost any simple errand you can do at work or household chore can be extended to those you know.

- **Watch the kids.** Offer to watch your neighbor’s kids so they can do some errands or just take a break.
- **Write a note.** Birthday, holiday, or figure out something to thank them for.
- **Move the cans.** Drag their garbage cans back off the street on trash day.
- **Buy extra flowers.** “Accidentally” on purpose buy too many flowers for your home and bring some to a neighbor.
- **Go for coffee.** If you’re going for coffee, ask if you can get some for a co-worker. Or just surprise them. A week later they may want to go along with you to talk.
- **Shovel the driveway.** Clear the snow for someone else before you do yours.
- **Bake too many.** Bake cookies. Make extra – enough to share.



For people you don’t know — yet

Team up with others to display some kindness in a public setting to people you’ve never met. Do it with no strings attached and without any sermons. Just do helpful things. Always explain what you are doing by saying something like: “We’re doing a free community service project to show God’s love in a practical way.” Conversations will get going easily. You’ll have fun and be able to notice what God may be doing in their lives.

Distribute inexpensive but helpful stuff like cool drinks or popsicles when it’s hot. Or provide a simple service that can be done quickly such as washing windows, raking leaves, cleaning toilets, clearing gutters, washing cars and hundreds more.





Connecting the stories

As you “notice” your way into the story of people’s lives by sincerely serving them or praying for them, you’ll become convinced that there are new chapters and better endings in their story than they may have ever dreamed.

It’s fun to point out what God may have already been doing in their lives, to explain how they can know Him better. And nudge them on their way.

How do you tell them about it? It’s tempting to think that you have to tell or sell the gospel as a powerful, sermon-like speech. Instead of blasting away, do some “story-listening.” That can turn into “story-exchanging,” which leads to the best gospel story-telling.

Many avoid evangelism because it usually puts pressure on those who speak and those who listen. It gets clouded with fear and guilt on both sides.

I’ve been watching for the moments that God makes to convey even a little bit of the gospel. It takes the pressure off and puts it on God. Even small bits of banter with people can unfold into some amazing conversations. He really is present in their life story, even as we talk.



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Relate

the gospel story with their story

“Crossing over” may be easier than you think

I find that many hesitate to do what I call “crossing over” into other people’s lives. It’s really a matter of engaging in conversations. Usually the crossing over never happens because we are waiting for some kind of door to spontaneously open. That’s just too much waiting. While we wait for God to open doors, we will often find that He’s already unlocked them.

Try doing this: Make up an excuse to connect with people. Sometimes I borrow things from people even when I don’t really need anything. At work I have borrowed paper or a pen or a stapler for an hour. Upon returning the item, it is natural to engage in a few minutes of conversation. With neighbors I’ve borrowed ingredients (for the cookies I bring over later), or tools that I may not urgently need. The key is to find a reason to “stop on by.” It may be to borrow something, or it may be to give them something. You might never know your neighbors if you don’t “stop on by.”



Watch for three stories. God is bringing together His story with their story. Be watching for how these stories intersect and overlap:

- **Their story.** How do they tell their own story? Keep listening to what’s important to them.
- **Your own “Jesus story.”** By your own “Jesus story” I mean the saga of how God has been doing things in your life that brought you into relationship with Jesus. As you know, that story is still unfolding. You are still being changed by Christ.
- **The gospel story.** By the gospel story I mean what God has been doing in lives, cities and nations through the ages. It’s a story, of course, that centers on what Christ has done, is doing and will do. There are hundreds of ways to tell God’s story.



Find ways to get into conversations with others about their life and their story. Listen well and you’ll find ways that your story corresponds to something of theirs. You’ll find it natural to exchange parts of your story with theirs.

You can explain how Jesus has come to play a major role in your life. From there it’s not hard to tell the greater gospel story as you have come to know Christ and walk with Him.