



Prayer as a Strategic Resource in Mission to Our World

BY JOHN D. ROBB

For today's hyperactive ministry leaders, apart from opening and closing meetings, saying grace at the table or as a special consolation in time of emergency or stress, prayer is most often treated as a harmless pastime rather than a powerful and strategic resource for mission to our needy world. In our attitude we often relegate it to the likes of doting old ladies who have nothing better to do with the autumn time of life. Certainly, for most spiritual leaders, prayer does not seem to be where the action is, otherwise wouldn't we be giving it far more attention in our busy lives?

A Revealing Case Study

One of the greatest illustrations of prayer as a strategic resource in mission is found in the experience of J.O. Fraser, the pioneer missionary to the Lisu tribe of southwest China. As a young missionary with the China Inland Mission in the early 1900s, he preached Christ for several years among the far-flung mountain villages of this people with almost no outward results, Fraser's few converts fell back into the clutches of demonism, and he himself, attacked by severe depression and suicidal despair, almost gave up his mission. Breakthrough occurred when two things happened:

1. The Spirit of God enabled him to pray "the prayer of faith" for several hundred Lisu families to come to Christ.

2. He succeeded in forming a prayer support group of eight to ten Christians in his home country to back up the work in ongoing prayer.

His wife later wrote about the difference this prayer effort made in Fraser's work: "He described to me how in his early years he had been all but defeated by the forces of darkness arrayed against him....He came to the place where he asked God to take away his life rather than allow him to labor on without results. He would then tell me of the prayer forces that took up the burden at home and the tremendous lifting of the cloud over his soul, of the gift of faith that was given him and how God seemed suddenly to step in, drive back the forces of darkness and take the field."

Fraser himself said:

"Work on our knees. I am feeling more and more that it is after all just the prayer of God's people that call down blessing upon the work, whether they are directly engaged in it or not. Paul may plant and Apollos water, but it is God who gives the increase, and this increase can be brought down from heaven by believing prayer whether offered in China or in England.....If this is so, then Christians at home can do as much for foreign missions as those actually on the field. I believe it will only be known on the last day how much has been accomplished in missionary work by the prayers of earnest believers at home..."

Solid lasting missionary work is done on our knees. What I covet more than anything else is earnest believing prayer, and I write to ask you to continue in prayer for me and the work here."

"I used to think that prayer should have the first place and teaching the second. I now feel that it would be truer to give prayer the first, second and third places and teaching the fourth....We are not dealing with an enemy that fires at the head only- that keeps the mind only in ignorance-but with an enemy who uses poison gas attacks which wrap the people around with deadly effect and yet are impalpable, elusive...Nor would it be of any more avail to teach or preach to Lisu here while they are held back by these invisible forces...But the breath of God can blow away all those miasmatic vapors from the atmosphere of a village in answer to your prayers. We are not fighting against flesh and blood. You deal with the fundamental issues of this Lisu work when you pray against the principalities, the powers, the world rulers of this darkness, the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies (Eph. 6:12)."

In the years that followed hundreds of families accepted Christ and ultimately a people movement involving tens of thousands of Lisu ensued. Today in southwest China and northern Burma they are a missionary tribe taking the Gospel to other tribes about them.

What would have happened if Fraser had not formed that prayer support group which he so faithfully kept informed with up-dates from the field? Would the breakthrough have occurred? In the decades since, how many potential breakthroughs among the unreached have not occurred because: 1) Prayer was not perceived and used as a strategic weapon. 2) Prayer

supporters were not kept linked ongoingly to a particular unreached group or provided with a supply of up-to-date information? In relation to our society's theme for this year, could it be that prayer as perceived and practiced by "Great Commission Christians" is a crucial missing link in the accomplishment of world evangelization?

After dealing with the nature and importance of prayer briefly, I would like to enumerate some reasons from Scripture, history, and current experience, why prayer may be the crucial link, the strategic resource in world missions. Having demonstrated the importance of strengthening this link, we will then put our minds together in discussion to discover new ways we might operationalize the linkage of focused intercession and the unevangelized world.

Prayer at its very heart is a linking activity. First, prayer links us with God to receive His power and direction as we pray for the world and carry out our own ministries. Secondly, as we pray for the unevangelized world, it links us with particular unreached groups and the Christian workers laboring among them. It links our efforts and their efforts to God in His almightiness, without whose help all such efforts ultimately are in vain. O. Hallesby writes:

"The work of prayer is prerequisite to all other work in the Kingdom of God for the simple reason that it is by prayer that we couple (italics mine) the powers of Heaven to our helplessness, the powers which can turn water into wine and remove mountains in our own life and the lives of others, the powers which can awaken those who sleep in sin and raise up the dead, the powers which can capture strongholds and make the impossible possible.

Yet having said this, prayer can often be the missing link in our efforts on behalf of the unevangelized world. As important as good organization, planning, and strategy are in world evangelization, in our busyness for God we may have neglected to link up with His power and direction to carry out that particular part of His mission given to us. And that is a crucial omission!

While doing some research for this presentation at the Fuller Seminary library, I was startled to discover amidst their sizeable holdings on missions to discover no book specifically about prayer and frontier missions. True, there were passing references to prayer in volumes on the history of missions and the theology of missions. But the great bulk of books dealt with issues of mission strategy, organization, and planning. Could this unwitting omission at one of the great schools of missiology be reflective of a more general neglect of a critical factor in the accomplishment of world evangelization?

In musing over the failure of his generation to evangelize the world by 1900, A.T. Pierson attributed this failure not only to a lack on consecration in the church evidenced by a lack of giving, faith, personal holiness, but most of all to the lack of prevailing prayer. He wrote:

"Every time the church has set herself to praying there have been stupendous movements in the

mission world. If we should but transfer the stress of our dependence and emphasis from appeals to men to appeals to God—from trust in organization to trust in supplication—from confidence in methods to importunate prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit, we should see results more astounding than have yet been wrought."

"There is...too little simple looking unto that real source of success, the power of God in answer to prayer, first to open doors of access, then to raise up and thrust forth laborers and then to break down all opposition and make the truth mighty in converting, subduing, saving and sanctifying."

Participants at the Northfield Convention of 1885 expressed the same sentiment:

"But above all else our immediate and imperative need is a new spirit of earnest and prevailing prayer. The first Pentecost crowned ten days of united, continued supplication. Every subsequent advance maybe directly traced to believing prayer and upon this must depend a new Pentecost. We therefore earnestly appeal to all fellow disciples to join us and each other in importunate daily supplication for a new and mighty effusion of the Holy Spirit upon all ministers, missionaries, evangelists, pastors, teachers and Christian workers and upon the whole earth; that God would impart to all Christ's witnesses the tongues of fire and melt hard hearts before the burning message. It is not by might not by power but by the Spirit of the Lord that all true success must be secured. Let us call upon God till He answereth by fire!"

Twenty-five years later the year 1900 had come and gone. At the conclusion of the great Edinburgh Conference on Mission in 1910, Jonathan Goforth expressed his disillusionment with the missions movement for generally failing to follow through in making prayer an ongoing priority in world evangelization:

"Listening to the addresses that day one could not but conclude that the giving of the Gospel to lost mankind was largely a matter of better organization, better equipment, more men and women. Symptoms indeed were not lacking that a few more sparks might have precipitated an explosion. But no, the dethronement of the idol of ecclesiastical self-efficiency was apparently too great a price to pay....We still refuse to face the unchangeable truth that 'it is not by might nor by power, but BY MY SPIRIT.'"

Perhaps the Edinburgh Conference Report also betrays a recognition that prayer had not been given its due in the years before and after 1900: *"When the church sets itself to pray with the same seriousness and strength of purpose that it has devoted to other forms of Christian effort, it will see the Kingdom of God come with power."*

Whether or not prayer became a missing link in the frontier missions effort before and after 1900 is a question for further research. Nevertheless, we face the same danger today of falling into the trap of thinking that if we were just better organized, just better coordinated, just

better deployed with our people and resources, we would be able to accomplish world evangelization. Pierson and Goforth were right. They realized that world evangelization above all is an issue to be decided by spiritual power, the power of the Holy Spirit released in response to the prayers of His people.

Arthur Matthews, the late former missionary of the China Inland Mission, put his finger on the reason that we often do not emphasize prayer enough: "The concept that treats prayer as if it were a supplemental booster in getting some project off the ground makes the project primary and the prayer secondary. Prayer was never meant to be incidental to the work of God. It is the work." Could we and other missions strategists be guilty of treating prayer as if it were a nice add-on to the other "strategic" things we are up to? Could it be that we have ignored the most strategic activity in accomplishing world evangelization? Reasons from Scripture, the history of missions and current missionary experience all compel us to contend that prayer is our most strategic resource in Christ's mission to our world.

1. God desires and requires intercessory prayer for the accomplishment of His saving purpose for the peoples of the earth.

Jesus told us to pray, *"Thy will be done on earth as it is done in Heaven."* Abraham interceded for Lot in Sodom, Moses prayed that God would turn from His wrath against Israel, Daniel for the return of Israel from Babylon. Ezekiel was told by God, *"I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it but I found none"* (Ez. 22:30)

Why does God desire and require His people's intercession? Most likely because God originally gave dominion of the earth to humankind. That dominion has never been revoked by God. Satan's dominion achieved through rebellion against the Creator is a false, illegitimate, usurped dominion. Redeemed through Christ, we can exercise our God-given right to influence the affairs of this world through the exercise of intercessory prayer. Like Kuwait's request for the multi-national force to come against the illegitimate dominion of Iraq, so we in prayer as God's redeemed children, pray that His will be done, His kingdom come on earth. Prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit breaks through the false dominion of the enemy and clears the way for His deliverance and shalom to come to all peoples. Linked through prayer with the risen Christ, sitting at His side (Eph. 2) far above all authority and dominion, we share in the accomplishment of His redemptive purposes.

Dick Eastman, president of World Literature Crusade, recently shared with our staff at World Vision how early in 1988, God had led him to take a team of intercessors throughout Eastern Europe. Their mission was *"to confront the strongholds of Communism."* In obedience to God's leading, they carried out a "prayer walk" around the Politburo building in Bucharest where less than two years later, Ceausescu made his last stand after pridefully announcing his regime would last for a thousand years. While in Berlin, God led Dick to go out with a German friend in

the middle of the night to face that still forbidding wall. Moved in intercessory prayer, they both laid their hands on the wall and prayed, "In the name of Jesus, come down!"

In the dramatic events of the last year in Eastern Europe God has used the prayers of His people to shake the nations. He can do the same thing in the unevangelized world. He is seeking those who will stand before him in the gap for the 2,000 major unreached peoples, the 1,000 unevangelized cities, and the 30 unevangelized countries.

2. Victory in the spiritual realm is primary, and it is won by prayer.

Remember Moses' intercession as he held up his hands before God while Joshua and the army of Israel fought the Amalekites in the valley below? Each time Moses' arms grew tired and faltered, Israel's army was pushed back. But as he sustained his stance in prayer with uplifted arms, the Israelites were victorious.

Later in Israel's history. King Jehoshaphat relied on the weapons of united fasting and prayer, public worship and praise which brought God's intervention against the invading armies of Israel's enemies. Bible teacher, Derek Prince, writes: *"These weapons, scripturally employed by Christians today, will gain victories as powerful and dramatic as they gained for the people of Judah in the days of Jehoshaphat.... Victory in the spiritual realm is primary. It is to be obtained by spiritual weapons. Thereafter its outcome will be manifested in every area of the natural and material realm."*

These two Biblical episodes vividly portray intercessory prayer as being the winning factor. Why should this be any different in today's battle for world evangelization?

3. Prayer has always undergirded and extended the missionary outreach of the church.

Prayer is mentioned over 30 times in the Book of Acts alone, and generally it is mentioned as occurring just before major breakthroughs in the outward expansion of the early Christian movement. For the Apostles extended times of united prayer and waiting on God together were pivotal in their mission to the unreached. Before the first great outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and Peter's mighty sermon that brought 3,000 into the church, it is recorded that the Apostles "all joined together constantly in prayer" (Acts 1:14). Then, as the Apostles and their new converts *"devoted themselves to prayer,"* signs and wonders occurred, the city was filled with awe, and people were added to the church daily (2:42-44). It was *"after they had prayed" that the place where they were meeting was shaken, all were filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God with boldness* (4:31).

The Apostles early on let it be known what their priority in mission was- *"We will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word"* (6:4). The result of the Apostles determined adherence to this priority was that *"The word of God spread, and the number of disciples*

increased rapidly, and a large number of the priests became obedient to the faith" (6:7).

Peter's prayer resulted in signs and wonders such as the raising of Tabitha. Later it was a time of prayer that opened his eyes to the revelation that the gospel was also for the Gentiles, making him willing to go and preach to Cornelius. It was also the church's prayer that brought the release of Peter from prison.

A period of prayer and fasting by five leaders of the Antioch church led to the setting apart of Paul and Barnabas for their frontier mission to the Gentiles. Afterwards they were sent out with more fasting and prayer (13:1-3). It was through prayer that Paul was not allowed by the Spirit of Jesus to enter Bithynia but redirected into Macedonia. And it was through the prayer and praise of God by the imprisoned Paul and Silas that an earthquake helped to originate the church at Philippi!

The whole European side of the modern Protestant missionary enterprise grew out of Pietism, a revival movement that was steeped in earnest prayer. From its influence the Danish-Halle Mission to India went forth and the Moravian movement under Count Zinzendorf emerged. One author writing about the Moravians said that "the glorious movement of the Spirit... among the Moravians at Herrnhut in 1727 [which] transformed them into what has been the mightiest evangelizing force in the world for the past two centuries, was borne in prayer."

The prayer meeting which the Moravians began in 1727 went on 100 years! By relays they offered unceasing prayer for the church and needs all around the world. This prayer effort kindled their desire to proclaim Christ to the unreached and led to the beginning of modern missions. And from this one small village, over 100 missionaries went out in 25 years.

Decades later, William Carey, while still employed as a humble shoe repairman to support his part-time preaching, drew a homemade map of the world, entering all information he could find about its regions and countries. As he mused over the world's appalling needs and problems, he turned the information gathered into heartfelt intercession. His biographer reveals: "*Often in the silence of the night... by the dim rush light, he would scan that map and then kneeling before it, pour out his soul to God.*" Prayer for the world was a definite motive force in the call and service of the one who came to be known as "the father of modern Protestant missions."

In 1806, a few college students from William's College took refuge from a sudden rainstorm beneath a haystack. Sitting amid the hay, they used the time to pray for the world and its needs. Out of that unlikely venue for a prayer meeting, the American mission movement was born.

Robert Glover sums up the role of prayer in the history of missions:

"From Pentecost and the Apostle Paul, right down through the centuries to the present day, the story of missions has been the story of answered prayer. Every fresh outbreak of missionary

energy has been the result of believing prayer. Every new missionary undertaking that has been owned and blessed of God has been the germinating of seed planted by the divine spirit in the hearts of praying saints."

4. Spiritual revivals wrought by prayer have powerfully impacted frontier missions.

It has been said that *"all the mighty spiritual revivals which constitute the mountain peaks of missionary annals had their roots in prayer."* Jonathan Goforth, missionary revivalist in the Far East at the beginning of this century, described the powerful revivals and awakenings that took place in Korea and China, which not only revived the church but brought tens of thousands from unreached peoples to Christ. It all began with small bands of believers deciding to pray together regularly for an outpouring of God's Spirit upon them and upon the unconverted. Goforth later discovered it was not only the missionaries who had been praying, but someone in his home country:

"When I came to England, I met a certain saint of God. We talked about the revival in China and she gave me certain dates when God specially pressed her to pray. I was almost startled on looking up these dates to find that they were the very dates when God was doing his mightiest work in Manchuria and China....I believe the day will come when the whole inward history of that revival will be unveiled and will show that it was not the one who speaks to you now, but some of God's saints hidden away with Him in prayer who did most to bring it about."

In Hawaii, the revival known as the "Great Awakening" (1837-43), began in the hearts of missionaries who were moved strongly to pray. At their annual meetings in 1835 and 1836 *"they were powerfully moved to pray and were so deeply impressed with the need of an outpouring of the Spirit that they prepared a strong appeal to the home churches, urging Christians everywhere to unite with them in prayer for a baptism on high."* There were soon signs of growing interest in spiritual things among non-Christians, and then in 1837, so sweeping a spiritual awakening occurred that the missionaries had to labor night and day to accommodate multitudes anxiously seeking the assurance of salvation. In one day over 1,700 converts were baptized and in six years, 27,000 were added to the church.

J. Edwin Orr, the late historian of revivals, observed that the 19th century spiritual awakenings *"revived all the existing missionary societies and enabled them to enter other fields... [and] practically every missionary invasion was launched by men revived or converted in the awakenings."* Of four great outpourings of the Holy Spirit in the 19th century, he wrote:

"The turn of the century awakenings sent off pioneer missionaries to the South Seas, to Latin America, Black Africa, India and China. There arose denominational missionary societies such as the Baptist Missionary Society, the American Board, and other national missions in Europe.... Then a second wave of revival reinforced the foreign missionary invasion of all the continents.... William Carey was followed by societies ready to evangelize India. Robert Morrison opened a way for missionaries to settle in the treaty ports of China.... Missionaries pushed north from the

Cape of Good Hope as David Livingstone explored the hinterlands of Africa."

Of most importance to this discussion, Orr traced the origin of the spiritual awakenings which launched new missionary enterprises to worldwide prayer meetings which intensified before they occurred. David Bryant concurs with Orr's analysis. He has detected a fivefold pattern in the outward movements of the gospel over the last 300 years:

1. A movement of united prayer begins.
2. A renewed vision of Christ and His church emerges.
3. The church is restored in unity and in its determination to obey the lordship of Christ.
4. A revitalization of existing ministries and outreach occurs.
5. This leads to an expansion of the gospel among those who have been untouched to that point.

Bryant observes, *"God's primary strategy is to bring his people together in prayer... in order that they might seek him unitedly. They pursue in prayer a fresh revelation of the glory of God's Son so as to penetrate all levels of society with the gospel and to launch new mission thrusts to the ends of the earth."* He has quoted J. Edwin Orr as saying, *"Whenever God is ready to do a new thing with his people, he always sets them a praying!"*

5. Intercessory prayer enables God's children to possess their inheritance, the peoples of the earth.

In Psalm 2:8 the Lord invites us as His children to *"Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your possession."* The only thing we can take with us into eternity as our inheritance are other people. Our joy and crown, just as they were for Paul, will be others who come to Christ through our efforts. As this Psalm reveals, asking or praying opens the door to God's making the nations, or more specifically, the frontier peoples our inheritance.

In the history of missions, great in-gatherings into the church of Christ appear to be linked to strong, persistent praying. John Hyde, missionary to northern India, became known as "the apostle of prayer" since God raised up scores of national workers in answer to his prayers. He made a covenant with God to pray for one person to accept Christ each day which resulted in 400 conversions the first year. The following year, he decided to trust God for two a day, with 800 coming to Christ that year. Finally, the next year, as his faith grew, he trusted God for four a day. Through much travail in prayer, four a day came to Christ through his work.

A woman missionary influenced by Hyde's prayer life resolved to devote the best hours of her time to prayer, making prayer primary and not secondary as before. God said to her, *"Call upon me and I will show thee great and mighty things. You have not called upon me and therefore you do not see these things in your work."* As she began to make prayer the priority in her ministry, enormous changes resulted with 15 baptized at first, and 125 adults coming to Christ during the first half of the following year. Later she wrote, *"Our Christians now number 600 in contrast with*

one-sixth of that number two years ago."

Elsewhere in India, prayer has also (proved to be key to great in-gatherings among unreached peoples. Missionaries working among the Telugu outcastes were discouraged to the point of almost abandoning the work because of the lack of response. However, the last night of 1853, a missionary couple and three Indian helpers spent the night in prayer for the Telugus on a hill overlooking the city of Ongole. When the first light of day dawned, they all shared a sense of assurance that their prayers had prevailed. Gradually the opposition broke over the next few years, and a mighty outpouring of the spirit brought 8,000 Telugus to Christ in only a six-week period. In one day over 2,200 were baptized and this church became the largest in the world!

In 1902, two lady missionaries with the Khassia Hills Mission were challenged by the need to pray and Khassian Christians also began to pray for their unconverted fellows. In a few months over 8,000 were added to the church in that section of India.

Wesley Duewel of OMS International, known as a kind of guru on prayer for missions, told me recently that the first 25 years of their mission's work in India was very slow. Only one church per year on the average came into being. Out of a period of intense heart searching by the team of missionaries, the decision was made to recruit 1,000 people in their homelands to pray 15 minutes a day for the work. Not long after things began to move substantially. Over the next several years, the mission went from 25 churches with 2,000 believers, to 550 churches with more than 73,000 believers. Duewel believes the massive amount of prayer, harnessed and specifically focused on their efforts, turned the tide. One of his Indian coworkers exclaimed to him: *"All of us are seeing results beyond anything we could have imagined!"*

Jonathan Goforth, in writing about the Korean revival of 1907, said: *"[It was] intense, believing prayer that had so much to do with the revival which... brought 50,000 Koreans to Christ. We are convinced too that all movements of the Spirit in China which have come within our own experience may be traced to prayer." One missionary remarked to him, "Since the Lord did so much with our small amount of praying, what might He not have done if we had prayed as we ought?"*

6. Effective mission strategies come from research immersed in prayer.

Joshua was one of the original "researchers" who spied out the land of promise in Numbers 13. Because he knew the facts about the land and its peoples so well, he was prepared to become the great military strategist that he later became during the conquest. However, in the book of Joshua, we see him continually seeking God for His guidance in the development of effective strategies. He did not lean on his own understanding but relied upon God's direction given through prayer.

The principle is still the same. I am becoming more and more convinced that coupling research

findings concerning the people group we are trying to reach with ongoing persevering prayer is an unstoppable combination in the process of developing effective mission strategy. John Dawson's recent book *Taking Our Cities for God: How to Break Spiritual Strongholds* insightfully ties together ministry-related research and intercessory prayer.

7. Prayer is the supernatural way of multiplying and sending out Christian workers into frontier missions.

As in the days of Jesus, the harvest is still plentiful, and the workers are few. World A, the unevangelized world, still claims only a smidgen of the mission force and the Church's material resources. We have talked about the issues of redeployment and mobilization for World A. Jesus' answer in a similar situation faced in his time is still the answer today: *"Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field (Matthew 9:37-38)."* Jesus did not tell the disciples to go all out and round up as many Christian workers as possible or to raise a million dollars for mission. Instead, he said that prayer to the One owns the harvest was the priority. Because he can call, equip, and send those workers who will be best able to reap the harvest.

I am convinced that the mightiest missionaries to the Muslims are not even converted yet. But God is waiting upon the prayers of His people to turn Muslim zealots around as he did the Apostle Paul, so they become missionaries to their people. I am convinced that as prayer networks are formed, focusing on particular peoples, cities and countries, we will see God raise up armies of new workers to reap the harvest in World A (the unevangelized world).

In 1880, when the China Inland Mission had only 100 workers, and then again in 1887, when additional workers were required, Hudson Taylor and his associates spent protracted time in prayer until they received the assurance of faith that the number required would be granted. Both times, after an appeal for 70 new missionaries in 1880, and 100 in 1887, the full number reached China within the specified time and with all their support supplied. A.T. Pierson is said to have exclaimed that, except for the prayers of praying mothers and fathers who prayed their children out to the mission field, there would have been no Student Volunteer Movement!

8. Prayer opens closed doors for occupation by a Christian presence.

The Apostle Paul urged the Christians of his generation to *"devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us too that God may open a door for our message so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ"* (Col.4:2-4). Don McCurry of Ministries to Muslims International recently gave me a striking illustration in this regard. Six years ago, he visited the West African country of Guinea. Sekou Toure, a Marxist leader, had just kicked out all the missionaries except two, and was busy torturing political prisoners. The two remaining missionaries, McCurry and 12 national pastors met to intercede for the country.

First, they interceded with God for the removal of this Marxist tyrant who had closed the door

to further mission efforts when most of the people groups remained unoccupied by the church. Then they put up maps around the room in which they were meeting, and together laid their hands upon those areas of the country and groups that had no Christian presence. They prayed and agreed together for a breakthrough and the establishment of Christian ministries in them. Within a year, Sekou Toure was gone, replaced by a benign leader who opened the door to missions once again, and today every one of the people groups they prayed for are now occupied by a national or missionary effort!

When Jonathan Goforth planned to launch a new work in northern Honan Province in China, Hudson Taylor wrote to him with these words: *"Brother, if you are to win that province, you must go forward on your knees."* His advice still holds today.

In the past year we have seen God open the anti-Christian bastions of Romania and Albania. Can we not expect Him to do the same with Mauritania, Morocco, Libya, Turkey, or Saudi Arabia, if God's people will focus their prayers on these difficult places?

9. Spiritual warfare breaks the control of the powers of darkness over people groups, cities and nations.

There are also links that need to be broken if frontier missions are to go forward. Chains of spiritual darkness and bondage often link unreached peoples, cities and countries to principalities and powers who seek to control the affairs of humankind. At present in the missions world, we are undergoing a rediscovery that the issue in reaching the unreached is one of spiritual power. Just as it was when Yahweh faced the gods of Egypt or Baal on Mount Carmel, so today the issue still is one of power encounter between the true God and false gods, those spirit beings who hold sway over segments of humanity.

Peter Wagner in a symposium on power evangelism at Fuller Seminary affirmed: *"Satan delegates high-ranking members of the hierarchy of evil spirits to control nations regions, cities, tribes, people groups, neighborhoods and other significant social networks of human beings throughout the world. Their major assignment is to prevent God from being glorified in their territory, which they do through directing the activity of lower-ranking demons."*

Ephesians 6 indicates that all Christians are involved in an unseen warfare with the powers of darkness, how much more those of us who are involved in frontier missions as missionaries, intercessors, researchers or strategists? Paul says our struggle or literally "wrestling" is to be carried on through prayer in the Spirit. Apart from the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, prayer is the only offensive weapon available to us in this cosmic warfare.

Obviously, if we are going to see missionary breakthroughs in peoples, cities and countries, we will need to learn how to use the offensive weapon of prayer to dislodge the powers of darkness. While discussing the receptivity or resistance of people groups to Christ, Wagner

draws out this implication: *"It goes without saying that if this hypothesis concerning territorial spirits is correct, and if we could learn how to break their control through the power of God, positions on the resistance-receptivity axis could change virtually overnight."*

Francis Frangipane, writing about the strongholds the powers of darkness maintain over groups of people, takes a similar line of thinking:

"There are satanic strongholds over countries and communities; there are strongholds which influence churches and individuals.... These fortresses exist in the thought patterns and ideas that govern individuals... as well as communities and nations. Before victory can be claimed, these strongholds must be pulled down, and Satan's armor removed. Then the mighty weapons of the Word and the Spirit can effectively plunder Satan's house."

Studies of the belief systems of pagan peoples attest to the reality of the picture of spirit beings portrayed in Ephesians 6, the book of Daniel and elsewhere. The Burmese believe in supernatural beings called nats arranged hierarchically with control over natural phenomena, villages, regions, and nations. Their link with these beings is maintained through witches or mediums, at least one of whom is found in each village.

In Thailand there are both village and regional spirits, with the village ones being subordinate to the regional ones. Pillars are often erected in villages as a habitat for their guardian spirits. One CMA missionary told me of the increasing oppression and lack of spiritual responsiveness she and her coworker encountered in a village once this pillar was erected. An OMF missionary thinks he has identified the national principality over all of Thailand.

In India a similar cosmology involving guardian spirits over villages and others over regions is found. They are often associated with disease, sudden death and catastrophe. Kali, the goddess of destruction, is a regional deity known especially among the Bengalis of West Bengal in Calcutta. Anyone who has been to Calcutta can see the devastating impact she and her worship have made upon that city and its people. Christian workers living there complain of severe oppression and serious disunity in the churches. Strangely enough they have never yet come together to pray for the city and to take offensive action against the powers of darkness.

A book on the African country of Zimbabwe reveals that every region, city, village is thought to be under the control of territorial spirits. In Nigeria an Assemblies of God leader, who formerly was high-ranking occult practitioner before his conversion, said that Satan assigned him control of 12 spirits, each of which controlled 600 demons. He testified, *"I was in touch with all the spirits controlling each town in Nigeria, and I had a shrine in all the major cities."*

Recently in a meeting with a well-known Japanese evangelist and several missionaries to Japan, I was surprised to discover how much the Japanese are still bound up with occultism. We can be fooled by the highly technological, modern look of Japan, and not realize that large numbers of

the Japanese still attend Shinto shrines, that every school child carries an amulet, or that Shinto priests are called upon to dedicate each new building. And a dangerous phenomenon is now facing us in the West as New Age cults advocate "channeling" to communicate with spirit beings, thus reestablishing links with the powers of darkness originally broken by the evangelization and Christianization of Western societies.

The problem is that most of us do not realize we are in a no-holds-barred war, and therefore, they feel no need for prayer as a strategic weapon. John Piper, a Minneapolis pastor, puts it this way:

"The problem is that most Christians don't really believe that life is war, and that our invisible enemy is awesome. How then are you ever going to get them to pray? They'll say they believe these truths but watch their lives. There is a peace-time casualness in the church about spiritual things. There are no bombs falling in their lives, no bullets whizzing overhead, no mines to avoid, no roars on the horizon; all is well in America, the Disneyland of the universe. So why pray?"

In Mark 3:27, Jesus said something that is especially relevant to the activity of frontier missions: *"No one can enter a strongman's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strongman. Then he can rob his house."* It stands to reason that we as missionaries cannot be successful in entering and carrying off what has belonged to Satan for centuries-portions of humanity under his dominion-without binding the territorial spirits that have delegated control there. Prayer in the Spirit informed by facts uncovered by research is a potent force in binding the strongmen over cities, people groups and countries. Again John Dawson's book demonstrates how research can uncover a community's link with the powers of darkness, and united prayer in the Spirit can break that link.

In Matthew 18:18-19, Jesus gave a startling assurance to those who pray in this way: *"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you, that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my father in heaven."* Effective spiritual warfare occurs when we pray in unity with others. This teaching demonstrates the importance of prayer groups and networks being formed where people pray prayers of agreement for certain people groups, cities, or countries in an in-depth way. This, it seems to me, is what will bring the breakthrough.

The Greek word for "bind" in these verses means "to chain or imprison." The prayers of God's people joined together will chain and circumscribe the activity of spirit beings hostile to the glory of God and the expansion of His kingdom on earth. As the Apostle Paul puts it, *"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds"* (II Corinthians 10:3-4).

The experience of Omar Cabrera, a pastor/evangelist in Argentina, underlines the awesome weaponry that prayer in the Spirit brings to bear on the occult realm. Over the past several

years, he has made it his practice to fast and pray for several days before opening an evangelism campaign in a city he is trying to reach. Often during those periods of fasting and prayer, spirit beings will come against him, even appearing in grotesque shapes, to contest his presence and plan to evangelize that city. They often say, "You have no right to be here. This is my territory." To which he replies, "On the contrary, you have no right to be here. I bind you in the authority of Jesus Christ, the one who has all authority in heaven and on earth." Immediately that spirit flees the scene and a higher principality will often come into place against Cabrera. In the same way, through a struggle in prayer, Cabrera breaks the hold of that being which often turns out to be a spirit of witchcraft. When the topmost strongman is bound, the mood of the whole city changes-often from one of resistance to the gospel, to one of great receptivity-with hundreds and thousands coming to Christ, accompanied by extraordinary signs and wonders, healings, and miracles. Using this approach, Cabrera has gone from ministering to a congregation of under 20, to being the pastor of the world's third largest church with over 140,000.

As zany and outlandish as Cabrera's experiences seem to the naturalist in all of us, we would do well to apply what he and many other Christian workers are learning about prayer warfare to the work of frontier missions. As I have traveled around leading consultations and seminars on mission strategy for national Christian workers, the issue of spiritual warfare keeps coming up. My growing conviction is that in many resistant contexts we can strategize and evangelize until we are blue in the face with no effect until we identify and bind the strongman over the group we are seeking to reach. Until this happens, we are unlikely to see much of a response.

Could it be that whole peoples we have written off as being "resistant" are in themselves really not resistant at all, but are in the grip of spirit beings that are the source of the resistance? Arthur Matthews writes of his burden in intercession for two specific areas of Southeast Asia where the missionaries were unable to make any headway: *"So asserting my position with Christ in the heavenlies on the basis of God's word, I took unto me the whole armor of God in order to stand against the wiles of the devil, and to withstand his opposition to the gospel." He held on until news from both places began to change: "The resisting powers in both places were weakened, making possible victories for the Lord."*

Loren Cunningham, general director of Youth With A Mission, describes his experience in praying and fasting for three days with 12 coworkers in 1973. As they prayed the Lord revealed they should pray for the downfall of the "prince of Greece." The same day in New Zealand and Europe, YWAM groups received a similar word from God. All three groups obeyed and came against this principality. Within 24 hours, a political coup changed the government of Greece, bringing greater freedom for mission activity in the country.

While I was in Senegal conducting a seminar recently, an Assemblies of God mission leader told me their denomination had begun to pray and fast corporately for the Muslims. They are now seeing a new responsiveness on their part of these people and churches are being established among them.

10. The Challenge of Linking the Global Prayer Movement with Frontier Missions

David Barrett and Todd Johnson in their *Our Globe and How to Reach It* estimate there are 22 active global prayer movements in existence. Certainly, we rejoice in the resurgence of prayer in the worldwide church, however there is little evidence that these prayer movements are linked directly enough with the unevangelized world. The Lausanne Global Prayer Strategy for world evangelization is one example. Although Christians from 167 countries are involved in praying for world evangelization each morning as the new day dawns, the focus of prayer is quite general with no move yet being made to link these intercessors with specific segments of the unevangelized world or to feed them with updated information so that their prayers will be specific more and effectual.

The Concerts of Prayer movement is another similar example. It provides an excellent introduction to getting people praying for spiritual revival and world evangelization but needs to get participants tied in with specific people groups, cities, or nations for more in-depth, persevering, and informed prayer. Even the call to prayer, issued by the 1984 Seoul Congress on Prayer and World Evangelization, though it emphasized the importance of prayer and spiritual warfare, gave no indication of how this kind of praying could be tied to the unevangelized world in a practical, ongoing way.

There are enormous prayer resources within the Body of Christ that by and large are not being tapped for the unevangelized world because we have thus far failed to develop practical mechanisms to link these resources with the need of the unreached. For example, at the Indianapolis 1990 Congress on the Holy Spirit and World Evangelization last month, no one from the plenary shared any of the facts concerning the unevangelized world with the 20,000 participants, nor did we stop to pray for any particular segments of that world. This was a glaring oversight.

Nevertheless, there are some good models which suggest it is possible to get Christians at home linked up with particular people groups, cities, and countries by feeding them with ongoing information so that they will be able to hold on like bulldogs until the breakthrough occurs. The nonresidential missionary approach, which the Southern Baptist have pioneered, is noteworthy. One nonresidential missionary to an ethnic minority of China has managed to get 500 churches praying for this people group. He has researched the people thoroughly and kept the intercessors informed. Now thousands are coming to Christ and a breakthrough is on the way.

The [Global Prayer Digest](#) put out by the Frontier Fellowship of the U.S. Center for World Mission, is another fine example of a practical mechanism which links praying Christians with unreached people groups. The [Adopt-A-People](#) program also has great potential for linking praying congregations with particular people groups.

I am convinced more than ever that unless prayer networks come into being, focused on each of

the 3,000 unevangelized segments, the unreached peoples cities and countries, world evangelization by AD 2000 or any time will be just a pipe dream. As we have seen, the battle must be won in the spiritual realm if Christian workers are to occupy and reap the harvest. Like marines landing on an island beach, they will need a prayer bombardment to knock out enemy positions before they are able to occupy that people, group or city in need of Christ. George Peters, the late missiologist wrote,

"We have become in missions so wrapped up in technology and methodology that we have forgotten that missions is number one, the releasing of divine dynamics....Reaching the unreached will, first of all, mean for us not only to lay hold of it in faith, but to develop thousands and thousands of prayer cells that will commit themselves wholeheartedly to prayer until the victory will be won."

Along with Peters, I believe that probably the most strategic thing we can do for frontier missions is to stimulate the formation of ongoing prayer and spiritual warfare networks focused on particular unreached peoples, cities and countries. They will become those watchmen on the wall who will never be silent day or night until, as Isaiah says, God makes that segment of humanity "*a praise in the earth*" and until those people will be called "*the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord*" (Isaiah 62:1-12). David Bryant puts it this way:

"The greatest challenge any of us will ever face in the global cause of Christ [and] the greatest contribution any of us will ever make to the glorious task of advancing Christ's Kingdom among earth's unreached is... to grow as men and women of prayer and to mobilize others with us into a movement of prayer for the world.' Other things wait to be done but this is the greatest."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How can we stimulate the formation of prayer networks (national and international) for approximately the remaining unreached peoples which are the ***ethne*** (ethnic groups), the original and continuing focus of Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 24:14 and 28:19? (Please see www.joshuaproject.net for more resources and information.)
2. How can they be kept going, supplied with up-to-date information so they don't bog down?
3. Do we have any other effective models already in operation that can be shared?
4. How can the growing global prayer movements be more closely linked with frontier missions?
5. Suggest some practical steps that need to be taken and an operational mechanism that can be set up. What agencies or individuals should be responsible?

PRAYER

1. Pray for any unreached peoples, unevangelized cities or countries you are aware of or specially concerned for as the Holy Spirit brings them to mind. Pray for the breaking of the hold of principalities and powers, liberation to receive Christ and for Christian workers and ministries among them.
2. Pray for the development of ongoing prayer networks for every remaining unreached people, unevangelized city or country, that God will raise up intercessors with a special burden for each segment of the unevangelized world.
3. Ask for God's guidance in the implementation of the ideas we have discussed. What should we do? How can we work together to martial national and international prayer efforts focused on the unevangelized world?

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