

STRATEGIC PRAYER – PRAYER AS A STRATEGY

The role of prayer is dramatically expanding. It is no longer solely to undergird God's work in the world, but to enable us to discern His priorities and the development of His strategies for carrying out His work in a given place. Traditionally, Southern Baptists have clearly emphasized the importance of prayer in the support of the established work of missionaries and local Christians. This focus of praying continues to be valid, absolutely essential. But increasingly we are discovering God's intention that prayer be also the ultimate, strategic, offensive factor in opening doors and hearts closed to the gospel.

Actually, prayer as strategy is not a new concept. The clearest word comes from God Himself: "Ask of me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance" (Psalm 2:8). Jeremiah quotes His words: "Call unto me, and I will answer, and show you great and mighty things that you know not of" (Jer. 33:3). As far back as the 17th chapter of Exodus, we find Moses employing prayer as strategy (See Ex. 17:9-13). In Acts 1:14 we find the New Testament pattern: "They all joined together constantly in prayer," then Pentecost happened. Biblically, we see a direct connection between the prayers of God's people and the occurrence of breakthroughs in the accomplishment of his purposes in the world.

History gives vivid examples of the priority role of prayer. In 1727 German Moravians began a prayer meeting that lasted 100 years. Revival swept through their churches, and they began sending out missionaries. They became the outstanding evangelistic force in the world for that time in history.

In the early 1780's William Carey knelt before a free-hand map of the world that he had drawn and poured out his soul for the lost of the world. Strategic praying from his burdened heart was the beginning point of the modern missionary movement.

In the United States the mission movement is said to have begun in 1806 in a haystack. Some students at Williams College in Western Massachusetts were caught in a rainstorm. They took refuge in a convenient haystack and used the time to pray for the lost of the world. Those young men wound up on the mission fields, pouring out their lives for the sake of the gospel.

In all of our own history, we Southern Baptists have clearly emphasized the absolute necessity of prayer in missions support and as

missions resource. Many Southern Baptists are faithful in daily missions praying. However, in the last decade we have become aware and burdened about the many lost people who live in places where doors are tightly closed to the gospel and to our traditional ways of doing missions. This has driven us to seek to grasp, understand, and experience prayer as a strategy in the opening of those closed doors, and as the strategy for the calling out of personnel to find ways to witness and ministry to those peoples. (Equally significantly prayer must also be the foremost strategy for spiritual progress in traditional mission fields where the doors are open and witness is unrestricted.)

Thus, many Southern Baptist churches have been employing prayer as strategy by participation in praying open the closed doors of unreached people groups. Some have adopted a people group or closed country as their prayer project. Now national conventions among traditional mission work are adding this dimension of praying to their ministries.

Understanding Prayer as a Strategy

Here are some of the basics in our understandings of employing prayer as a strategy:

1. Prayer as a strategy opens the pray-er to God's direction as to how, what, and for whom to pray. We are not to presume to set God's priorities, but to seek to discern what He wants to happen, and then to pray for that to take place. We seek to attune our hearts to His heart's desire, and we pray for the fulfillment of His heart's desire: which is that all the peoples of all the earth will have opportunity to know and love His Son, Jesus Christ. Prayer as a strategy begins by seeking God's will.
2. God accomplishes His purposes in this world in response to the prayers of His people. This is His strategy: He releases His power as His people pray. He combines our specific prayers with His power to make a difference in the flow of the gospel into remote and difficult places of the world, as well as those peoples and places close at hand. He graciously gives us this essential role of partnership with Him.
3. Prayer as strategy takes the pray-er into realms of spiritual warfare, for prayer is the strategy that breaks the power of Satan and his darkness. He is the enemy, seeking to blind, discourage and destroy. Breaking his hold is a supernatural task. The only way to do so is through spiritual battle, earnest, persistent,

extraordinary prayer. Paul describes the Christian's armor in Ephesians 6:13-17, and then says, "Pray! Pray at all times in the Spirit." Strategic prayer is a battle that is fought, spiritual armor in place, on our knees.

4. Prayer is the only strategy that can reach into all nations and all peoples in this world. Countries and peoples can and do close themselves to other Christian strategies, but they cannot close themselves to prayer and to the power of the Holy Spirit. Because of local restrictions in some lands and among some peoples, prayer is the only strategy that can be employed. Prayer must be the foremost strategy, also, in those lands where doors are open and witness unrestricted. Additionally, prayer is the strategy that makes other strategies effective and fruitful.

5. Prayer is the strategy in which every believer can participate; every Christian of every age, every circumstance and every race. Every believer cannot make a financial difference in the spread of the gospel. Every Christian cannot go to other lands to introduce people to Jesus. Through prayer, however, every believer can have significant impact for Christ in every nation.

6. Prayer as a strategy brings forth laborers into the mission field. When God's people pray His voice is heard and obeyed. God can speak to those for whom prayer is lifted. He may call laborers to that harvest as they pray.

7. Prayer as a strategy is the most crucial work we do. Oswald Chambers said, "Prayer does not just fit us for the greater work. Prayer is the greater work." Prayer is also hard work. Prayer requires our time, energy, attention, and self discipline. It demands that we overcome our spiritual inertia. Prayer is work, but it reaps spiritual rewards for the kingdom.

Applying a Prayer Strategy to Your Daily Life and Ministry

How can these understandings be applied to your daily lives and ministries as you serve through your life, home, and ministry?

1. Give prayer the central, pivotal place in your daily walk with the Lord. Keep at the front of your mind that all the good, fine things you do for Christ are largely futile unless your plans and activities come from the mind of God, are lived out in the Spirit of Christ, and are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

2. Develop a Prayer Strategy as a part of your strategies. The purpose of a Prayer Strategy is to design a comprehensive, year around plan for motivating and mobilizing strategic praying. As a Strategy Coordinator, as the Lord for His plan for emphasizing and

experiencing prayer, and for extending the emphasis to believers in the carrying out of kingdom goals and kingdom work in your assignment. A selected Prayer Strategy Team could be a helpful approach to the development of a Prayer Strategy.

3. Select a Prayer Coordinator from close friends or family who will aid you in development and implementation of the Prayer Strategy Team. This person then would help coordinate among the churches and others in your Prayer Strategy by keeping these key groups abreast of your on the ground ministries and specific needs.

4. Implement from the following possible components a Prayer Strategy that comes from listening and discerning God's leadership for your assignment. Other SCs are already using some of these actions.

A. Emphasize use of Dedicated Prayers:

1. Develop a monthly Prayer Guide for daily prayer to be distributed among the prayer teams.

2. Encourage the use of the Prayer Guide to be used individually, as families and with groups or churches.

3. Encourage prayer attention to the Global Prayer Network request that is sent periodically through the area office with instructions as to how to distribute the request to prayer team members and to national convention leadership and convention churches.

4. Be faithful to send prayer requests weekly or monthly to the SC's Prayer Coordinator for sharing with the prayer team and to the Prayer Strategy Office for national distribution.

5. Frequently report how prayer has been answered.

B. Design a worldwide prayer emphasis:

1. Set an annual Worldwide Day for Prayer and Fasting for those praying with you for your assignment. The Prayer Strategy Office would be eager to cooperate in any way you see fit to focus on your assignment for the set date.

2. Promote the use of the booklet "Thirty Days of Focused Prayer for Muslims" during Ramadan (available from the Prayer Strategy Office).

3. Participate in "year of Prayer for Muslim Peoples" (planned for 1995).

C. Create prayer support systems:

1. Share prayer needs with emeritus missionaries regularly in order to mobilize their involvement.

2. Encourage prayer partnerships or triplets among prayer team members.

3. Establish a prayer partnership between college, BSUs and seminary students focusing upon your assignment.

4. Establish a prayer partnership with a church association, or state convention. Regularly send prayer requests and answers.

D. Observe focused times of prayer:

1. At an appointed time every day (for example 9:00 a.m.), prayer teams are asked to observe a moment of concerted prayer for the release of God's power on your assigned people.

2. Have a special emphasis on family worship among Prayer Team Members.

3. Create prayer chains, prayer vigils, and other concentrated efforts for Prayer Team Members.

4. Set and observe a full day of prayer and fasting as an SC family jointly with other leaders of the SC's prayer team for the effectiveness of the work of your assignment.

5. Report in person to churches, organizations, and groups who support prayer for your assignment while you are on furlough. Enlist others to become active in praying.

6. Share "prayer as strategy" concepts with believers and encourage other Christian organizations to plan and adopt a Prayer Strategy for their own work.

Two essentials for effectively employing prayer as strategy are: (1) the conviction that prayer is the ultimate strategy that releases God's power and accomplishes things that simply will not happen until God's people begin to pray; and (2) the belief that the strategy becomes most effective when prayer is united, specific, and based upon current information related to the prayer involvement.

Employing prayer as a strategy calls for Christian to pray for:

- the lost, both locally and to the ends of the earth.
- local Christian workers and believers in all the nations.
- workers of all Great Commission Christian groups.
- more laborers to go into the harvest.
- government officials of all lands, and for their decisions that impact the flow of the gospel.
- those in positions to plan strategies for advancing the Good News.
- worldwide revival and spiritual awakening.

Missionary Ed Pinkston, serving in the Ivory Coast, wrote "When we get to heaven and are able to read God's history book, I believe we will see that the people really responsible for many of the miracles are the unseen, unsung believers who lift to the Father their intercessions on behalf of His people and His work."

Our God is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine...(Eph.3:20)

Adapted from a paper by Minette Drumwright, Director, International Prayer Strategy Office, Foreign Mission Board, November 1993.

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