

Intercession and World Evangelization

by J. Terry Riley

“Go into the fire of hell” roared the holy man. As if in a hypnotic trance the chicken walked straight into the fire and was immediately consumed. After a few moments the holy man retrieved an amulet that was attached to the neck of the chicken with a metal poker. To the amazement of the young ones present, the amulet wasn’t scorched. Everyone felt the presence of the deity. It was heavy and cruel. It was unforgiving and thirsty for loyalty. Throughout the night the people prayed and sacrificed. The young boys and girls were taught the secret words and rituals that have been passed down from generation to generation. It is at these times that the people of this community commit themselves to their “deity” for another season.

Also at this time unholy allegiances are made and another generation is introduced to the deity. No other way is known to this people. This community is part of an ethnic group, also known as a people, that is unreached with the Gospel. Strong barriers exist that prevent the Good News from penetrating their hearts. (I Corinthians 2:12-15)

Breaking Demonic Allegiances

To some degree, all unreached peoples are in demonic bondages that prevent them from responding to the Gospel. (Rev. 13:7) Most if not all unreached peoples make covenants with demonic powers. The cycle of demonic allegiances must be broken. God’s people must pray that the eyes of their hearts may see and understand who Jesus is and why He came to earth. (Matthew 17:21)

And He (Jesus) was casting out a demon, and it was dumb; and it came

about that when the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke; and the multitudes marveled. (Luke 11:14) When Jesus confronted and cast out the demon, the crowd was astonished. Why? Simply because they had never seen any power greater than demons. These people did not know that there was a stronger power than that of Satan’s demons. Many unreached peoples do not respond to the gospel because they fear retaliation from the demons if they change spiritual allegiances. They need to know that the power of God is real and more powerful.

But He knew their thoughts, and said to them, “Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and a house divided against itself falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Consequently, they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (Luke 11:17-20) This is not a case of Satan usurping himself, but was a real spiritual power encounter between God and the demonic world. All the people knew that the man was demonized, and that the demon in his cruel grip tormented him so he could not speak. Jesus was able to break the power of the demon.

The Spiritual Landscape

Often God’s people do not realize when they are in a power encounter. Have you ever asked God to sensitize you to your spiritual environment? The Western worldview has dulled our ability to recognize the spiritual landscape. Often the spiritual realm has

been described as “superstitions,” “myths,” “wild imaginations,” or “unscientific.” Evangelistic and mission efforts are at times ineffective because believers have not taken the spiritual dimensions into account. Elisha did well when he prayed that his servant could see with spiritually sensitive eyes. (II Kings 6:15-19)

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own homestead, his possessions are undisturbed; but when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied, and distributes its plunder. (Luke 11:21-22)

The strong man described here is a demon. The demon guards his territory. What is the spiritual territory that is in conflict? Central to the conflict are the souls of men, women and children. The strong man will guard his possession—the souls of people—until someone stronger subdues him. Only God can bind him. Our prayers can unleash the power of God and bind the strong man. Many unreached peoples are unreached because God’s people have not prayed strategically for their deliverance. Many times, God’s people could not pray strategically because they either did not know who the unreached peoples were or they were unaware of the allegiances they had made to demonic deities centuries ago.

God has given us the spiritual authority to occupy the gates of our enemy. However, instead of using prayer as a combat communication device to unload Holy Spirit guided bombs to enemy targets, we often use prayer as a genie’s lamp to lavish blessings on friends, family and ourselves. (Matthew 16:18; Matthew 28:18; Acts 1:8; Romans 1:16; Ephesians 1:18-23)

Is Prayer Important?

A while ago, I heard a Christian organization explain their purpose, goals, and objectives. I was impressed with the carefully thought out plans and strategies of organization and implementation. I was looking at the sheets of paper which described these plans and I noticed that one of the last points indicated a dependence on God, the power of the Holy Spirit, and prayer. I asked what their prayer strategy was and how they were going to use prayer to reach their goals. Sadly to say, they had no idea or thoughts on this important point. Then I realized that as a matter of intellectual assent, or as an after thought, they had added to the end of their plans a passing reference to prayer.

Another time I attended a monthly ministerial fellowship. The topic for discussion was evangelism.

"Why aren't we seeing results?" wondered one pastor. "Maybe you should try another method," interjected another.

For about an hour the discussion centered around methods and techniques. While I wholeheartedly recognize the need for sensitive and contextualized approaches, there is much more to evangelism than methodology. What about prayer and the ministry of the Holy Spirit? How important is that?

Often prayer does not take its proper place in the hearts and minds of believers. If things are not working like we think they should, often times we devise better and more elaborate plans.

Be a Watchman

We need to be like a watchman. In ancient times a watchman would be stationed in a high tower or on the wall that protected a city. His job was to observe and sound the alarm when danger approached. A watchman didn't casually look beyond the city once in awhile, but he was to keep constant alert. He was to pay attention, to observe

intently, he was to be aware. It was so important that if the watchman performed his job improperly that in many instances the penalty for negligence was death. The whole population depended on him to be alert and to be constantly on the lookout for danger.

Intercessors are watchmen. They keep alert and pray. They pray "hedged" of protection around those they are guarding. They discern because they understand the landscape. It is hard work, but where would we be if it were not for the watchmen/intercessors in our lives?

Just as there are watchmen that keep watch over a city, there are watchmen that watch over a city that is besieged. In II Samuel 11:16 we read, "*So it was Joab who kept watch on the city.*" Watchmen were to observe enemy movements on the walls and pay special attention to the gates. Their job was to observe and report if the enemy were trying to escape.

Intercession is more than defensive, it is offensive. We pray to thwart or preempt enemy attacks. Also, we pray to defeat and push out the enemy, so God can occupy the hearts and minds of those that are presently held captive.

Intercession and Information

"God bless all the missionaries of the world. God bless India". I'm not sure how God answers prayers like this. The effectiveness of our prayers is often determined by the information that we possess. If we want God's specific answer to prayer, we need to pray specifically.

The watchman gathers information, so does the intercessor. "Prayer with knowledge" is the motto of the effective intercessor. If you are interceding for your family, church, country or for an unreached people you must have information. Not only must we observe, but we should search and dig for information that will fuel our prayer.

Some Exciting Information

For the first time in Church history we know who the unreached and adoptable peoples are. The Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse, a consortium network of nearly 100 mission agencies, has gone through the process of identifying the unreached and adoptable peoples. This will result in the dawn of a new era for the Church. For the first time we can clearly define world evangelization from a people perspective.

The unreached peoples are like orphans and slaves. They need to be adopted into the heavenly family and given freedom. (Galatians 4:4-6) Each unreached people needs a band of committed believers who will pray and intercede regularly for them.

There are five reasons why an unreached people is adoptable and needs strategic prayer:

1. *The people have not heard the Gospel in an understandable way or form.* The majority of the people do not know who Jesus is. (Matthew 24:14; Acts 19:10; Romans 10:14)

2. *The people group has not responded to the Gospel.* There is something that hinders this people from responding. The spiritual bondages and sins need to be identified and prayed over. (Matthew 7:21;26-27; Matthew 13:19; Acts 2:27-38; I Corinthians 1:21,25; Hebrews 3:18-20)

3. *The people group has no growing church or fellowship of believers.* There are perhaps no believers, or too few, to gather together regularly for worship, prayer and instruction. Or there are restrictions that prohibit group gatherings of believers. In any case, a church movement has not yet started. (Acts 2:42-47; Acts 16:5; Romans 15:20-21; Colossians 2:5-7)

4. *The Word of God has not been translated into the mother tongue of the people.* Every person deserves the privilege to read, hear or have the Word of God in their heart language. The Word of God needs to be translated into

the language of the people. (Acts 2:6-8; 27-38; Revelation 5:9-10)

5. *The Word of God is not available.*

Perhaps there is a high percentage of illiteracy or there are legal restrictions that prevent the Word of God from being known and distributed. (John 17:17-20; Acts 19:20; Romans 10:1; Colossians 3:16; II Timothy 3:16-4:1-4.)

The bottom line is that an unreached people group is a people that lacks the necessary resources to evangelize itself. They cannot pray for themselves because they do not know God. However, we who are God's people need to pray for them. I believe God is waiting for His saints to pray for the unreached peoples of the world. We know that God wants all to come to Him. Perhaps He is patiently waiting for His people to intercede for them, to pray for their deliverance and usher them into His kingdom.

Practical Steps

How shall I begin the process of praying for an unreached people? Here is a suggested process to follow:

1. Try to team up with others who have a burden for the unreached. A group of believers committed to the same goal will provide encouragement, strength and accountability.
2. Contact your chosen mission agency and find out which unreached peoples have the highest priority. If you or your church do not have an attachment to a mission structure, contact the AAP Clearinghouse and they will gladly help you select a people.
3. When learning and praying about an unreached people it is important to pray that God will burden you with His burden for this people. As you pray God will burden your heart. Many years John Knox prayed for Scotland. As a result God burdened him further for

the people of Scotland. He is remembered as crying out, "God give me Scotland or I die."

Declaring God's Wisdom

Has it ever occurred to you that in the spiritual realm not all satanic forces are aware of Christ's victory at the cross and tomb? Why is it that in Ephesians 3:9,10, we read that we are to, "*bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things in order that the manifold wis-*

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dom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places."?

New Approaches

A new approach to short-term missions is to send prayer teams to regions where there has been little Christian witness or minimal response to the Gospel. These teams do not engage in evangelism or construction projects.

They focus exclusively on information gathering and intercession for the peoples of that region. The strategy involved is that of going on site, to pray, praise God, and announce His glory to the principalities. The principalities need to know that they are defeated. As demons are confronted for the first time with the reality of their defeat, their hold on people will be broken.

Another approach is that of prayer walking. As we walk we claim God's promise of Joshua 1:3, "*Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you,*" "*and having shod your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.*" As believers walk their neighborhoods they bind the demons of each household and pray for the salvation of each family as they walk by the house. Walking around schools and other government buildings is offered claiming that God will be glorified by that institution. This physical walking accompanied with intercession in effect

acknowledges God's the rightful ruler, but also serves notice to the principalities that their occupancy of the region is hereby challenged and terminated.

A documented study of these new approaches would be useful in determining their effectiveness. Hopefully, someone will take the challenge of doing this. Time will tell how effective these approaches to

intercession have been and will be.

Final Words

We are God's agents to bring about world evangelization. We need to send missionaries to the unreached peoples and to pray for the advance of the Gospel among the nations. We must claim the nations on our knees and God will delight in honoring this type of prayer. The motto for the Benedictine order of the Catholic Church is: Pray and Work. What a marvelous combination. Let us seek to do all our work in world evangelization with a balance between praying and working.

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