

Chapter One

The Priority and Power of Prayer

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As you think of our mission as Christians to take the Gospel to everyone, everywhere, do you ever feel “caught” in a terrifying obligation rather than “called” to a thrilling opportunity?

Many Canadian Christians today wonder if it is possible to effectively reach their new Canadian neighbours with the good news of Jesus Christ. They struggle to believe that people of drastically different cultures and religions would actually accept the radical claims of Christ. Indeed, this is difficult to comprehend with the natural mind. But the witness of Scripture and the stream of testimonies pouring in from around the world give us incontrovertible reason to take on Christ’s challenge with joy and assurance. Lives can be transformed here as well!

1 - Prayer is the Key to Fruitful Evangelism

The evangelization of every ethnic group is doable. Also, current reports on the global advance of the Gospel indicate that one factor in particular is making a measurable difference—focused, intercessory prayer. Regions receiving

such attention in prayer are experiencing an increase in conversion rates and in successful church planting initiatives.

“Neglect of Prayer is a Willful Limitation of Success”

This is not a new phenomenon. Similar experiences have marked the history of the Church for 2,000 years, and today’s harvest of spiritual fruit attests to the fact that determined intercession results in divine intervention. Aware of the relationship between prayer and evangelism, Robert Speer once argued that a neglect of prayer is actually a denial that God is leading. He added, “Neglect of prayer is a willful limitation of success.”¹

In October 1993, nearly 21 million intercessors worldwide participated in history’s largest prayer meeting ever—30 days of focused intercession for 64 nations. From every continent, prayer ascended to God for the 64 nations within the 10/40 Window (an area of the world stretching from 10 degrees to 40 degrees north of the equator, from the west of Africa to the east of Asia). One nation located in that region of the world, India, was profoundly affected by the innumerable hours of prayer offered on its behalf. At the international headquarters of *Every Home for Christ* (EHC), harvest reports from India have since indicated that responses to the Gospel presentations increased from 1% to 10% in the months immediately following the first global prayer thrust. In addition, the formation of Christ Groups (church plants) by EHC’s ministry in India have soared to more than 150 per month! This is record-breaking church planting in a predominantly Hindu nation.

That God answers prayer is a recognized and accepted fact in the Church worldwide, including Canada. But it appears that the practice of prayer may not be as popular. The astounding difference between church growth in Canada and that experienced on other continents raises the question of whether we are really praying.

For those who may doubt the critical contribution of prayer to the forward movement of the Church, consider the words of Dr. A. T. Pierson...“Every step in the progress of missions is directly traceable to prayer. It has been the preparation for every new triumph and the secret of all success.”²

Whether we long for personal growth or hope to touch our world and affect the course of history, we must view prayer as both the starting point and goal of every movement in which are the elements of permanent progress.

The Power of Prayer in Russia and the CIS

Recently the pastor of a Presbyterian church in Denver, Colorado, was speaking with Paul Ilyin, Every Home for Christ’s Regional Director for the CIS. “Where can we plant a church?” he asked. “Our congregation would like to do something that will bear lasting fruit in your region of the world.”

Pointing to a world map near him, Paul replied, “Just pick a town, any town! Everywhere people are hungry and waiting.”

Inspired by the abundance of opportunities, the pastor walked up to the map and focusing his attention on the central region asked, “How about here, right in the middle?” That was the town of Tumen, located in the centre of Siberia. Immediately plans were put into motion to begin the planting of a church in a community with no Christian witness.

Upon his return to Russia, Paul sent a team of three men to the town of Tumen (one of them named Peter Stalin!). Their chief purpose was to pray for every home and distribute Gospel literature to each one.

Meanwhile, back in Denver, the Presbyterian congregation began praying and preparing a team who would join the three men and labour with them for some time.

Through many months of preparation, the congregation in the United States was trained in evangelism praying and organized prayer teams that would cover the entire project with intercession before, during and following the launching of the new church. In 1997, barely a year after the initial vision, the town of Tumen had a church of 354 members led by a pastor trained at St. James Bible College in Kiev, and was already sponsoring a second church plant in a neighbouring community!

The plan was so simple. First, prayer. Second, a Gospel presentation to every home, with prayer. Third, an invitation to a public meeting where the Gospel was preached and for which there was much prayer. Fourth, careful follow-up, with discipleship training and more prayer.

This scenario is a familiar one in Russia and the surrounding Republics. Over the last seven years 54 churches have been planted following this simple yet focused strategy. And some of these 54 churches now have up to 10 other church plants under their care.

In June 1997 another pastor from an Assembly of God church in Denver led his congregation to plant a church in Slavutich, the town that was built to replace Chernobyl in Ukraine. They followed the same straightforward plan of prayer, proclamation and follow-up. By April 1998 a congregation of over 150 members was worshipping in Slavutich!

2 - Prayer is the Starting Point and the Sustaining Force

History and current testimonies deliver abundant proof that God works profoundly, effectively and completely in answer to believing prayer.

Prayer must not be seen as a ritual, but rather as an essential tool that God gave us to build His kingdom in our lives and in the world.

As Canadians, we do have good reasons to be very concerned about the spiritual condition and destiny of our country and its people. Is it reasonable then to dare to believe that we can evangelize our Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, materialistic or secular humanist neighbour here in Canada? The incredible progress of the Church in nations where countless believers are at work in prayer should convince the most skeptical that everyone, everywhere can be transformed by the power of the Gospel.

God Can Do Amazing Things in Canada

A.W. Tozer left us this encouraging thought: “Anything that God has ever done, *He can do now*. Anything that God has ever done anywhere, *He can do here*. Anything that God has ever done for anyone, *He can do for you*.”

Today the great and rapid progress of world evangelization on other continents and in spiritually dark regions of the world serves as an up-to-date testimony of what God will do when His people pray. It is also a strong reminder for us that the evangelization of our multi-cultural and multi-faith nation is achievable.

As we ponder the recent testimonies from Siberia and Ukraine shared earlier, we cannot help but note the dramatic answers that followed prayer offered on behalf of a spiritually thirsty people. If spiritual thirst is a qualifier for receptivity to the Gospel, then Canadians are ripe for harvest!

Various sources and reliable research indicate that Canadians are searching for inner peace and meaningful relationships.

In *A Matter of the Heart*, published in early 1998, Rudy and Marny Pohl share their perspective on God's vision for Canada. They confidently affirm that our multi-cultural and multi-faith nation must be viewed through a Christian-Biblical world view which states that God is the Lord of history and Jesus is the King of the nations. In *A Matter of the Heart* we are encouraged to consider all the peoples of this great country as being here by God's sovereign choice and for His purpose. Here, amidst the nations, the Church of Jesus Christ has the opportunity to be light and consolation. Those who embrace God's vision for Canada will cease to fear for the future of this country and be free to love their neighbour as themselves. Consequently, all who seek to minister to this nation must prayerfully and thoughtfully address divisive issues and past sins in light of the mercy and grace which govern the Kingdom of God.³

Unshakable Confidence in God

As we plan and develop strategies to engage our resources, time and energy to evangelize Canada, perhaps one of the first questions we should ask ourselves is simply, "What do I believe and expect from God?"

In *Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer makes these insightful comments:

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. ...the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. ...Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about him or leaves unsaid... Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, "What comes into your mind when you think about God?" We

*might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man. Were we able to know exactly what our most influential religious leaders think of God today, we might be able with some precision to foretell where the Church will stand tomorrow.*⁴

Without an unshakable confidence in the ability and willingness of God to bring everyone to the new birth experience, it will be difficult to pray effectively for the conversion and spiritual development of people with cultural and religious experience foreign to the Christian tradition.

In Matthew 9:35-38, Jesus assures us that God Himself is Lord of the harvest. Christ affirms with certainty that God is able to subdue everything that would seek to dominate the harvest. "...Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matthew 9:38). Implied in the word harvest is the promise of bounty, of fruitfulness and of hard work well rewarded.

3 - Prayer is the God Tool Against Resistance

But there is another reality about the harvest that cannot be overlooked. It is the *resistance* factor. In order to bring in the harvest, workers need to exert some measure of effort and careful planning. In the same way we need to be aware of the resistance factor working against the Gospel and determine to address it.

The Struggle Against Powers of Darkness

The apostle Paul wrote, "*For our struggle is not **against** flesh and blood, but **against** the rulers, **against** the authorities, **against** the powers of this dark world and **against** the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*" (Ephesians 6:12, emphasis Dugas).

This "against" dynamic that operates behind the scenes is the resistance to the Gospel we so often encounter.

In his second letter to the Church at Corinth, Paul writes about the presence of strongholds in the world. He immediately defines these as arguments and pretensions exalted **against** the knowledge of God. In the same passage he assures the reader that the Church is well equipped to demolish them.

*“The tools of our trade aren’t for marketing or manipulation, but they are for demolishing that entire massively corrupt culture. We use our **powerful God-tools** for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ. Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity”⁵ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5, emphasis Dugas).*

The phrase, “powerful God-tools,” so aptly describes what God has ordained prayer and proclamation of the Scriptures to be able to do. In some of the darkest regions of the globe these “powerful God-tools” are changing the face of the religious world.

For instance, India, the birthplace of two of the world’s great religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, represents a formidable stronghold of resistance to the Gospel. With a population of well over 900 million, this vast nation’s ethnic diversity is also one of the most complex in Asia.⁶

How can we ever hope to penetrate such a nation and see its people transformed? To those who believe that God is Lord of the harvest, India’s people are a part of God’s promised harvest. And the recent advancement of the Gospel we described earlier in that culturally and religiously complex land is staggering.

The prayers of the Saints are effective to push back the canopy of oppression over people groups and nations so that

the light of the Gospel may penetrate deep into people’s hearts.⁷ The “powerful God-tools” at the disposal of the Church do have divine power to subdue every dark kingdom to the Lordship of Christ.

4 - Prayer Guidelines for Church Planting

In Matthew 9:35-38 Jesus addresses a number of issues related to the harvest. He clearly links prayer to the harvest. But the harvest is not released and brought in only by prayer. Much work is involved. And in this brief passage the Lord also links prayer to work.

No one who has been directly or indirectly involved in evangelism and church planting will take lightly the human responsibility that is required to do the work. And for each phase of evangelism and church planting initiative there must be a thoughtful prayer support. Here are several basic areas to consider.

The Need for Divine Guidance

The zeal and commitment of the great missionary apostle Paul had no bounds. His commitment to Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God and the Gospel took him into situations where most of us (if not all of us), hope we will never have to face. His zeal and commitment were in complete submission to the will and timing of the Lord of the harvest. The Book of Acts leaves no doubt as to the restrictions of God’s perfect will and timing: “...*having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the Word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to*” (Acts 16:6,7).

Preparation and confirmation are essential before launching into a church planting initiative. In *Church Planting, the Next Generation*, Kevin Mannoia recommends a list of seven steps to consider, the first being personal

commitment to a significant season of prayer. It could be a month or perhaps the best part of a year spent in intentional prayer asking the Lord for an open mind and an open heart. His direction could be different from our wishes. Also ask the Lord to place thoughts, Scriptures, books and people in your life who can all influence you in the direction you need to go.⁸

The Need for Discernment

In contemplating a particular community for evangelism and church planting, it is critical to gain an understanding of the hidden things that hold the community captive to darkness and rejecting the Gospel. In Jeremiah 33:3, God reassures us that He can and will reveal hidden things. He alone can reveal the key to Gospel receptivity in a community as well as in the life of a single individual.

In recent years many evangelical leaders have demonstrated the need for what is now known as “*spiritual mapping*.” Simply stated, it is the process of gathering critical intelligence (information) of the past and present life of a community, region or nation in order to effectively influence people for Christ through prayer and evangelistic endeavours. The intent of spiritual mapping is to equip the Church in order to enhance its effectiveness in influencing people for Christ. George Otis, Jr., founder and president of Sentinel Group and spiritual mapping specialist, gives the following definition: “Spiritual mapping is a means whereby we can see what is beneath the surface of the material world; but it is not magic. It is subjective in that it is a skill born out of a right relationship with God and a love for His world. It is objective in that it can be verified (or discredited) by history, sociological observation and God’s Word.”⁹

Case studies, research and guidelines for spiritual mapping are increasingly available in book form in addition to being a focus at various conferences.

The Need for Appropriate Employment of Gifting

God knows exactly how to assemble for Himself an effective labour force! The gifts He has invested in each of us are to serve His great purposes.

When the time came to build the Tabernacle in the wilderness, He carefully chose, gifted and appointed the workers: “*See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, ...and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skills, ability and knowledge... Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab ...to help him*” (Exodus 31: 2, 3, 6).

One of the great challenges facing the Canadian Church today is the need to effectively reach and disciple the growing numbers of ethnic peoples within our borders. In *Canada’s New Harvest* we read, “Evangelism ...not only involves reclaiming nominal Christians, but compels witnessing to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Sikhs or Traditional Religionists.”¹⁰

It is critical to ask the Lord to provide workers He has filled with His Spirit, skills, ability and knowledge for the task, whatever region or people group is targeted. If you are launching a church planting initiative, ask the Lord to surround you with individuals who will provide you with strategic guidance and advice. Also pray for team workers with the appropriate gift mix for the job.

The Need for an Available Work Force

One of the first steps in mobilizing individuals is communicating the vision. Personal prayer serves as an effective means to increasing the passion in our own hearts and transferring the vision to more of God’s people.

Simply sharing prayer requests for the needs of a particular church planting initiative can awaken unusual interest in someone else. As Romans 12: 6-8 indicates, some

are needed to proclaim, others to serve, to teach, to encourage, to give, to lead and to show mercy. Allow this list from the book of Romans to enhance your prayers. The success of many ventures depend on the team that surrounds a leader. In *Missions Within Reach*, T.V. Thomas shares that team ministry is particularly effective in ethnic evangelism and church planting endeavours. Some of the great advantages are found in encouragement, shared insights and wisdom.¹¹

5 - An Illustration from Home: Prayer Changes Aboriginal Heart

Stories of God at work among First Nations people from the west coast of Vancouver Island to the northernmost reaches of the continent confirm that God desires to bring every people group in this land to know Him. Billy Arnaqu of Broughton Island knows the power of prayer because not only was he brought to spiritual life through the prayers of his parents, but also the entire church in Broughton Island was birthed through their intercession.

A former drug pusher and heading straight for disaster, Billy committed his life to Christ in 1980 during a house fellowship meeting in Broughton Island that his parents had organized. However, the destructive patterns of his past resulted in the demise of his marriage and the alienation of his children. Billy recognized he still had many strongholds in his life to pull down and territory to possess within his being—his mind, will and emotions. Instead of giving up, Billy decided to start winning this territory back through persistent, prevailing prayer and intercession, beginning with his own soul.

By 1993, Billy was pastoring the little church in Broughton Island, but still living alone. Coffee breaks and lunch hours would be spent in prayer for the restoration of his marriage and family. He also prayed individually for every believer in his community.

By the Spring of 1995, Billy and Daisy were remarried during a conference in Broughton Island, witnessed not only by the whole community but also representatives from at least 19 communities of the Eastern Arctic. Today their home is a sanctuary of peace, his relationship with his children restored, and that same peace is flowing out into many homes of Broughton Island. Healing is taking place within households that once knew abuse and family violence. This peace at the family level is also reflected in greater economic prosperity within the whole community. The entire town is becoming a safer, better, more peaceful community because of what God is doing in more and more households like Billy's.

For Billy, the key to all of this is prayer and fasting. He holds regular prayer times every morning at the church, where the mayor often joins him. The mayor also hosts prayer meetings at least twice a week in the community council chambers.

Prayer Results in Continual Revival

Now God is using Billy in even greater spheres of influence to ignite revival fires in the surrounding communities, among them Pangnirtung, Clyde River, Pond Inlet and Arctic Bay. His local church is a giving church, funneling thousands of dollars to other missionary endeavours every year. Billy leads or joins missionary teams that are reaching out to Arctic Russia and even Greenland.

When Billy first began to pray for the community to the north of him, Clyde River, Northwest Territories several years ago, he knew of no believers there. But about four years ago God linked him with a family in that community who had received Christ and opened their home for a house of prayer. These people longed to see the life of Christ come to their whole community, bringing healing and salvation as it had to Broughton Island.

Over the next couple of years God continued to work through prayer, and by January 1997 there were about 40 believers in a community of 600 people. In one week, in answer to prayer, God moved strongly in healing both hearts and bodies. By the time Billy and visiting pastor Roger Armbruster left, the number of believers in the community had doubled. God continues to draw people. For instance, when God healed the family of the town administrator, the change in his life was so evident that everyone who worked in his office who had family problems began to come to him for prayer. Within a short time everyone who worked for the town, or lived within his sphere of influence, had become a Christian.¹²

Conclusion

When we pray we are confessing confidence in the God who is greater. In response to our prayers He can create new dispositions in the hearts of those who oppose the Gospel. He can create a thirst for Jesus in the hearts of those who once rejected Him. He can create circumstances to override the prevailing circumstances. He can provide all we need, within and without, to make us fruitful and effective evangelists and church planters. And He can do all this because He is greater than all.

Whether the mountains we face are immediately before us or on the distant horizon of world evangelism, let us dare to pray with confidence and expect much in return. Prayer is not limited by our timid hearts nor bound by our feeble voices, for it goes forth to reside in the strong heart of God and is acted upon by His infinite power.

Action Points

- ✍ Take a few minutes to examine your worldview. Do you believe that prayer's effect on the unseen realm affects what takes place in the physical realm? How would such a worldview affect your ministry approach and lifestyle?
- ✍ How would you need to reschedule your day to make prayer a priority?
- ✍ What do you need to understand most about prayer for evangelism and what practical steps can you take in order to gain that understanding?

Chapter Notes

- ¹ Robert Speer in *Prayer Power Points*, compiled by Randall D. Roth, Wheaton: Victor Books, 1995. p.125.
- ² Dr. A.T. Pierson as quoted in *Change the World School of Prayer*, Dr. Dick Eastman, Published by Every Home for Christ, 1976.
- ³ Rudy & Marny Pohl, *A Matter of the Heart: Healing of Canada's Wounds*, Essential Publishing: Belleville ON, 1998. pp.92-100.
- ⁴ A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, Harper & Row Publisher: San Francisco, 1961. pp.1-2.
- ⁵ *The Message*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994.
- ⁶ *Strongholds of the 10/40 Window*, edited by George Otis, Jr. with Mark Brockman, Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 1995. pp.97-99.
- ⁷ John Dawson in *Light the Window*, Seattle: YWAM, 1995.
- ⁸ Kevin W. Mannoia, *Church Planting, The Next Generation: Introducing the Century 21 Church Planting System*, Light and Life Press: Indianapolis, 1994, 1995, 1996. pp.25-27.
- ⁹ George Otis, Jr. in *Breaking Strongholds in Your City*, edited by C. Peter Wagner, Regal Books: Ventura CA, 1993. p.33.
- ¹⁰ *Canada's New Harvest: Helping Churches Touch Newcomers*, Edited by Brian Seim, SIM Canada. p.59.
- ¹¹ Dr. T.V. Thomas in *Missions Within Reach*, Edited by Dr. Enoch Wan, China Alliance Press: Canada, 1995. pp.22-28.
- ¹² As recounted by Pastor Roger Armbruster of Harvest Field Ministries, Niverville, Manitoba.