

The great church planter and missionary statesman, the apostle Paul, from the depths of his heart expressed the request that every missionary today would have "Brothers, pray for us" (1 Thess. 5:25). The cause of world evangelism must go forward on the wings of prayer. Many churches on a regular basis have "a word of prayer for the missionaries. "But just how knowledgeable are our prayers? How can we, individually and collectively, be more effective in helping our missionaries through prayer?"

THE MISSIONARY CALL

The great harvest field of the world demands laborers. It was our Lord Himself Who instructed us, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest" (Matt. 9:38). Every Christian needs to beseech the Lord on a regular basis that He will raise up more missionaries. The exploding population of the earth demands more witnesses. In recent years there has been a noticeable decline in the number of missionary volunteers. Large numbers of faithful missionaries are reaching retirement age, and to replace these workers alone will require a considerable increase in new appointees. Ask God to reach into your local church and motivate believers to present themselves for full-time missionary service.

PERSONAL SPIRITUAL LIFE

Too often our prayers for missionaries are directed toward physical or financial needs. These, however, are not the greatest needs of God's servants. Paul reminded the Ephesian believers that he was praying for them. He prayed "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" (Eph. 1:17). "The knowledge of him" [Christ] is the most important single ingredient for successful missionary service. Ask God to make the missionary holy. Ask Him to enlarge his prayer life and his faith. The missionary needs to be filled with the Spirit and, as a result, to be evidencing the fruit of the Spirit. He needs insight into the meaning of Scripture. He must have wisdom in discerning the will of God and in making good decisions.

FAMILY LIFE

Missionary life can put tremendous strain upon marital relationships. The husband must live with his wife "according to knowledge, giving honor" to her (1 Pet. 3:7). The wife, on the other hand, must, by virtue of her spiritual life, be viewed among the "holy women" (1 Pet. 3:5). Special prayer should be made for missionary children, who must adjust to foreign cultures and then adjust back again when furlough time arrives. Pray for family harmony. Petition the Lord to give the children a healthy attitude toward missionary service so they will not become spiritual casualties.

VICTORY OVER THE FLESH

Contrary to the concepts of some, missionaries are ordinary people. They have an old nature just like the rest of us. They need to be sanctified. Paul prayed for the Thessalonian believers--"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly" (I Thess. 5:23).

Sins of the flesh beset the missionary. He must be delivered from pride, from racism, and from prejudice, which would hinder his effective ministry to the people of another land. Americans often have preconceived notions about other races and peoples, which may not be accurate and which certainly can be a hindrance to fruitful communication. The missionary must love the people to whom he is ministering with a genuine, God-given love.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

"Is any sick among you . . . let them pray over him" (James 5:14). Without seeking to solve all the exegetical and theological problems of this passage, it is sufficient here to point out that prayer for physical health is in order. The conditions under which missionaries labor differ depending on the countries where they serve. In many countries of the world sanitation is very poor. Food and water may be contaminated. Proper medical facilities can be in short supply or even non-existent. Constant prayer is necessary for the health of the missionary family.

RELATIONSHIPS

Genuine love is the lubricant that makes for good relationships. In writing to the Philippians Paul declared: "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phil. 1:9). Missionaries must have happy relationships with people if they are to be effective for God. This is not always easy just as it is not for us who are here at home. It is important that our requests to God include this important matter. Missionaries need to get along well with fellow missionaries. They also need to relate well to national pastors and other leaders if there are such on their field. A good rapport must be maintained with national believers. One's relationships with unsaved neighbors and friends is also vital in seeking to win them to the Savior.

SUCCESSFUL EVANGELISM

As a missionary Paul was particularly concerned that his friends pray for successful evangelistic outreach. "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course [spread rapidly], and be glorified" (II Thess. 3:1). The purpose of missionary work is to win people to Christ and to disciple them into mature believers. Ask the Lord to give your missionaries good contacts. They need to discover productive ways of reaching people in the culture where they are. Pray also that national believers will have an evangelistic zeal for their own people, and

pray that there will be receptive hearts among those to whom the Gospel is presented.

EVERYDAY STRESS

In foreign countries just the daily stress of living can be daunting to the missionary. Unless one has lived in other cultures, this is difficult to understand. Shopping can be quite a chore and require many hours of time. In certain areas the climate can be stressful. Interactions with government officials can be exasperating and time-consuming. There can be interminable delays in securing needed goods or services. The missionary needs to be reminded of the marks of Christian love: "Love suffers long and is kind . . . is not easily provoked . . . endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:4, 5, 7).

PERSEVERANCE

Evangelism and church planting in foreign lands are difficult. Satan is active and is opposing attempts to win converts and plant churches. Progress can be agonizingly slow. Results may be very meager even after years of work. The missionary must plod on, often without any "exciting" news to report. Paul, aware of the tremendous impediments to the struggling Christian, wrote to the believers at Colossae: "I do not cease to pray for you . . . that you might [be] strengthened . . . unto all patience [endurance] and longsuffering with joyfulness" (Col. 1:9-11). Endurance is so necessary in missionary service, but it must also be accompanied by "joyfulness." In interceding for missionaries don't forget to pray for this combination.

CONCLUSION

Missionaries will only be effective as their supporters uphold them in earnest, intelligent, and faithful prayer. General and non-specific prayers are not sufficient. Our prayers must be informed and Spirit-directed. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).

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