

The following pages contain articles for your recommended reading prior to mission training. The questions follow the articles. If you prefer to visit the original source, each title has a link to their website.

Prayer, The Work of Missions

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In order to mobilize a movement of prayer in the church and in order to sustain a will to pray in our hearts, we must think and talk about other things besides prayer. This is the key lesson I have learned in recent years.

1. We must talk first about war. Because life is war. And it is utterly impossible for people to know what prayer really is until they know that they are in a war, and until they know that the stakes of that war are infinitely higher than the stakes in the Persian Gulf or in the Reagan-Gorbachev consultations.

2. We must talk about the Sovereignty of God. Because only from this great truth can we know that we will win the war. And only then will we have hope and strength to press on in a life of prayer.

3. Then, when we have spoken first about the war we are in and next about the sovereignty of God, then we can come to what I will call the awesome place of prayer in God's purposes for the world.

Now let me try to sketch what I think needs to be said in these three areas - war, the Sovereignty of God, and the awesome place of prayer in God's purposes for the world.

1. Life is war.

When Paul came to the end of his life, he said in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." And in 1 Timothy 6:12, he tells Timothy, "Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life to which you were called."

Life is war because the maintenance of our faith and the laying hold on eternal life is a constant fight. Paul makes clear in 1 Thessalonians 3:5 that the number one target of Satan is faith. If we endure to the end we will be saved, Jesus said (Mark 13:13), and Satan is fighting always to bring us to ruin by destroying our faith.

Concerning his own life of warfare, Paul said earlier, "I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:26-7).

Concerning his ministry, he said, "Though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Ministry is war. (See also Revelation 6:2; 12:17; 17:14.)

Probably the most familiar passage on the warfare we live in daily is Ephesians 6:12-13.

We are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God.

In other words, life is war.

But most people do not believe this in their heart. Most people show by their priorities and their casual approach to spiritual things that they believe we are in peacetime, not wartime.

In wartime, the newspapers carry headlines about how the troops are doing. In wartime, families talk about the sons and daughters on the front lines, and write to them, and pray for them with heart-wrenching concern for their safety. In wartime, we are on the alert. We are armed. We are vigilant. In wartime, we spend money differently - there is austerity, not for its own sake, but because there are more strategic ways to spend money than on new tires at home. The war effort touches everybody. We all cut back. The luxury liner becomes the troop carrier.

Very few people think that we are now in a war greater than World War II, and greater than any imaginable nuclear World War III. Or that Satan is a much worse enemy than Communism or militant Islam. Or that the conflict is not restricted to any one global theater, but is in every town and city in the world. Or that the casualties do not merely lose an arm or an eye or an earthly life, but lose everything, even their own soul and enter a hell of everlasting torment (Revelation 14:9-11).

Until people believe this, they will not pray as they ought. They will not even know what prayer is.

In Ephesians 6:17-18 Paul-makes the connection for us:

Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, with all prayer and supplication, Praying on every occasion in the Spirit, and keeping awake for this with all perseverance.

Prayer is the communication by which the weapons of warfare are deployed according to the will of God. Prayer is for war.

Let me show you this more specifically from John 15:16-17.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

The logic is crucial. Why is the Father going to give the disciples what they ask in Jesus' name? Answer: Because they have been sent to bear fruit. The reason the Father gives the disciples the gift of prayer is because Jesus has given them a mission. In fact, the grammar of John 15:16 implies that the reason Jesus gives them their mission is so that they will be able to enjoy the power of prayer. "I send you to bear fruit so that whatever you ask the Father . . . he may give you."

So I do not tire of saying to our church, The number one reason why prayer malfunctions in the hands of a believers is that they try to turn a wartime walkie-talkie into a domestic intercom.

Until you believe that life is war, you cannot know what prayer is for. Prayer is for the accomplishment of a wartime mission. It is as though the field commander (Jesus) called in the troops, gave them a crucial mission ("Go and bear fruit"), handed each of them a personal transmitter coded to the frequency of the general's headquarters, and said, "Comrades, the general has a mission for you. He aims to see it accomplished. And to that end he has authorized me to give each of you personal access to him through these transmitters. If you stay true to his mission and seek his victory first, he will always be as close as your transmitter, to give tactical advice and to send in air cover when you or your comrades need it."

But what have millions of Christians done? They have stopped believing that we are in a war. No urgency, no watching, no vigilance, no strategic planning. Just easy peacetime and prosperity. And what did they do with the walkie-talkie? They tried to rig it up as an intercom in their cushy houses and cabins and boats and cars - not to call in fire power for conflict with a mortal enemy, but to ask the maid to bring another pillow to the den.

So my first point is that, if we are going to mobilize a powerful prayer movement for missions or even sustain the will to pray in our own hearts, we must talk about something else first, namely, war. We have so domesticated prayer that it is no longer, in many of our lives and churches, what it was created to be - a wartime walkie-talkie for the accomplishment of mission commands.

We simply must create in ourselves and in our people a wartime mentality. Otherwise the Biblical teaching about the urgency of prayer, and the vigilance of prayer, and the watching in prayer, and the perseverance in prayer, and the danger of abandoning prayer will make no sense and find no resonance in our hearts. Until we feel the desperation of a bombing raid, or the thrill of a new strategic offensive for the gospel, we will not pray in the spirit of Jesus.

2. Before we talk-about prayer we must talk about the sovereignty of God.

Why is this? Why is embracing of the sovereignty of God so crucial to a heart of prayer and a movement of prayer in the cause of world missions? There are two reasons that come from the experience of my own life and ministry. The first reason is that until we embrace the sovereignty of God, we cannot pray consistently that God would actually save lost sinners. And the second reason is that until we embrace the sovereignty of God we cannot be confident that the cause of

Christ will triumph and that all our praying will not be in vain. Let me explain these two crucial convictions.

2.1. Until we embrace the sovereignty of God, we cannot pray consistently that God would actually save lost sinners.

We can't do what Paul does so passionately in Romans 10:1, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they might be saved."

Paul's heart's desire is for the salvation of his fellow Jews. When our hearts ache for something, we pray for it. And so he says that his prayer to God is that they be saved. He wants something accomplished in his mission the salvation of Jews as he preaches in the synagogues. So he prays to God that this would happen. He asks God to save them. "O God, that they might be saved! Do it God! Do what you need to do!"

Now my point is this: that kind of praying is inconsistent if you do not believe in the sovereignty of God. And what I mean by the sovereignty of God here is that he has the right and the power to save unbelieving, unrepentant, hardened sinners. Now there are a lot of people who do not believe God has that right. They do not believe that God has the right to intrude upon a person's rebellion, and overcome it, and draw that person effectually to faith and salvation. They don't believe that God dare exert himself so powerfully in grace as to overcome all the resistance of a hardened sinner. Instead they believe that man himself has the sole right of final determination in the choices and affections of his heart toward God. Every person, they say, has the final self-determination in whether they will overcome the hardness of their hearts and come to Christ. And so it is finally in the hands of man, not God, who will be saved and how many will inhabit the Kingdom.

The effects on prayer for such people are devastating if they try to pray in a manner consistent with this rejection of the sovereignty of God.

They can't ask God to actually save anybody.

They cannot pray, "God, take out their heart of stone and give them a new heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11:19).

They can't pray, "Lord, circumcise their heart so that they love you" (Deuteronomy 30:6).

They can't pray, "Father, put your Spirit within them and cause them to walk in your statutes" (Ezekiel 36:27).

They can't pray, "Lord, grant them repentance and a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:25-26).

They can't pray, "Open their eyes so that they believe to the Gospel" (Acts 16:14).

The reason they can't is that all these prayers give God a right that they have reserved for man - namely the ultimate, decisive determination of his destiny. If they ask God to do any of these things, He would be the one who actually saves.

How then do you pray, if you really believe that man and not God must make the ultimate decisions about salvation in the universe?

I take an example from a well-known book on prayer that does reject God's sovereignty in the salvation of sinners. This writer says that the way to pray is to "Ask God to cause a specific person to begin questioning whom they can really trust in life." But my question then is: Why is right for God to cause a person to think a question and wrong for God to cause that person to think an answer? Why is it legitimate for God to take control of a person to the degree that He cause the person to ask a question he would not have otherwise asked, but it is not legitimate for God to exert that same influence to cause the person to give an answer that he would not otherwise have given - namely that Jesus should be trusted?

Here is another example of how this writer thinks we should pray for unbelievers: "Pray that God will plant in the hearts of these people . . . an inner unrest, together with a longing to know the 'Truth.'" Now my question is, If it is legitimate for God to "plant a longing" in a person's heart, how strong can the longing be that God chooses to plant?

There are two kinds of longings God could plant in an unbeliever's heart. One is so strong that it leads the person to pursue and embrace Christ. The other is not strong enough to lead a person to embrace Christ. Which do you pray for? If you pray for the strong longing, then you are praying that the Lord work effectually and get that person saved. If you pray for the weak longing, then

you are praying for an ineffectual longing that leaves the person in sin (but preserves his self-determination).

Do you see where this leads? People who really believe that man must have the ultimate power of self-determination can't consistently pray that God would convert unbelieving sinners. Why? Because if they pray for divine influence in a sinner's life, they are either praying for a successful influence (which takes away the sinner's ultimate self-determination), or they are praying for an unsuccessful influence, (which is not praying for conversion). So either you give up praying for conversion or you give up ultimate human self-determination.

Paul leaves no doubt where he stands on that issue in Romans 9:16, "It depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy." So he prays that God would convert Israel! He prays for her salvation! He does not pray for ineffectual influences, but for effectual influences. And that is how we should pray, too.

We should take the new covenant promises of God and plead with God to bring them to pass in our children and our neighbors and on all the mission fields of the world.

"God, take out of their flesh the heart of stone and give them a new heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11:19).

"Lord, circumcise their hearts so that they love you" (Deuteronomy 30:6).

"Father, put your Spirit within them and cause them to walk in your statutes" (Ezekiel 36:27).

"Lord, grant them repentance and a knowledge of the truth that they may escape from the snare of the devil" (2 Timothy 2:25-26).

"Father, open their hearts so that they believe the Gospel" (Acts 16:14).

In other words, when you believe in the sovereignty of God - in the right and power of God to bring hardened sinners to faith and salvation - then you will be able to pray with no inconsistency and with great Biblical promises for the conversion of the lost. That's the first reason why embracing the sovereignty of God is crucial for maintaining a heart of prayer and mobilizing a movement of prayer for missions.

2.2. Until we embrace the sovereignty of God, we cannot be confident that our prayers will succeed and that the cause of Christ will triumph.

The first missionary endeavor of the Protestants in England burst forth from the soil of Puritan hope. The Puritans, you remember, were those pastors and teachers in England (and then New England), roughly between the years 1560 and 1660, who wanted to purify the Church of England and bring it into theological and practical alignment with the teachings of the Reformation.

They had a view of God's sovereignty that produced an undaunted hope in the victory of God over all the world. They were deeply stirred by a passion for the coming of God's kingdom over all the nations. Their hearts really believed the truth of Psalm 86:8-9: There is none like thee among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like thine. All the nations thou hast made shall come and bow down before thee, O Lord, and shall glorify thy name.

And Genesis 12:3: In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

And Psalm 2:8: I shall give thee the nations for thine inheritance.

And Psalm 22:27: All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the families of the nations shall worship before thee.

And Psalm-65:2: O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.

And Psalm 66:4: All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy name.

And Psalm 86:9: All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name.

And Psalm 102:15: So the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth thy glory.

And Psalm 47:9: The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; he is highly exalted!

To him shall be the obedience of the peoples (Genesis 49:10):

Let the peoples praise thee, O God, let all the peoples praise thee. (Psalm 67:3)

Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. (Isaiah 55:4)

They believed the oath of God in Numbers 14:21, that the earth would be filled with the glory of the Lord (see Habakkuk 2:14).

This tremendous confidence that Christ would one day conquer the hearts of all the nations and be glorified by every people on earth gave birth to the first Protestant missionary endeavor in the English-speaking world, and it happened 150 years before the modern missionary movement began with William Carey in 1793.

Between 1627 and 1640, 15,000 people emigrated from England to America, most of them Puritans, carrying this great confidence in the worldwide reign of Christ. In fact, the seal of the colonists of Massachusetts Bay had on it a North American Indian with these words coming from his mouth: "Come over into Macedonia and help us," taken from Acts 16:9. What this shows is that, in general, the Puritans saw their emigration to America as part of God's missionary strategy to extend his kingdom among the nations.

One of those hope-filled Puritans who crossed the Atlantic in 1631 was John Eliot. He was 27 years old, and a year later became the pastor of a new church in Roxbury, Massachusetts, about a mile from Boston. But something happened that made him much more than a pastor.

According to Cotton Mather, there were twenty tribes of Indians in that vicinity. He specifically calls them "nations" to emphasize the missionary significance. Well, John Eliot could not avoid the practical implications of his theology: if the infallible Scriptures promise that all nations will one day bow down to Christ, and if Christ is sovereign and able by his Spirit to subdue all opposition to his promised reign, then there is good hope that a person who goes as an ambassador of Christ to one of these nations will be the chosen instrument of God to open the eyes of the blind and set up an outpost of the kingdom of Christ.

And so when he was slightly over 40 years old, Eliot set himself to study Algonquin. He deciphered the vocabulary and grammar and syntax and eventually translated the entire Bible, as well as books that he valued, like Richard Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*. By the time Eliot was 84 years old, there were numerous Indian churches, some with their own Indian pastors. It is an amazing story of a man who once said, "Prayers and pains through faith in Christ Jesus will do any thing!" (Mather, *Great Works*, I, 562).

The reason I tell you the story is to highlight the tremendous importance of solid Biblical hope for a movement of prayer and for the missionary enterprise. God has promised and God is sovereign: "All the nations . . . shall come and bow down before thee, O Lord, and shall glorify thy name."

This is what gripped the Puritan mind and eventually gave birth to the modern missionary movement in 1793. For William Carey was nourished on this tradition, as were David Brainerd and Adoniram Judson and Alexander Duff and David Livingstone, John Paton and a host of others who gave their lives to reach the hidden peoples of the world. The modern missionary movement did not arise in a theological vacuum. It grew out of a great Reformation tradition that put the sovereignty of God square in the center of human life.

This we must talk about first. Without it, the confidence of prayer, the largeness of prayer, the boldness of prayer, and the perseverance of prayer vanish. And what you have left is a kind of lifeless vestige that most people think of as "the prayer meeting" - weak, uninspired, small-minded. A heart of prayer and a movement of prayer for missions is sustained by focusing on something else first that life is war and that God is sovereign.

3. The Awesome Place of Prayer in the Purposes of God for the World

We have gotten a glimpse of what God's great purpose is for the world, namely, to fill this world with his glory (Numbers 14:21), by rooting out of his kingdom all sin and unbelief (Matthew 13:41), and filling it with white-hot worshipers (Revelation 3:15) from every people, tongue, tribe and nation (Revelation 5:9; 7:9). In the seed of Abraham, all families of the earth will be blessed. All the families of the nations will worship before the Lord. Now what is the place of prayer in the accomplishment of that great and unstoppable purpose of God?

Here we must be careful. The role of prayer is so unspeakably significant in God's design that we are prone to overstate its role, especially in relation to the Word of God and the preaching of the Gospel. So let me say, loud and clear, that I believe the proclamation of the Gospel in word and deed is the work of missions. And prayer is the power that wields the weapon of the Word, and the Word is the weapon by which the nations will be brought to faith and obedience.

Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are they to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard, and how are they to hear without a preacher? . . . Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. (Romans 10:13-17)

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. (Romans 1:16)

You have been born anew not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God. (I Peter 1:23)

Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by hearing with faith? (Galatians 3:2).

This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14)

The Word of God - the gospel of the Kingdom - is the weapon that God designs to use in penetrating the kingdom of darkness and gathering the children of light from all the nations. His whole redemptive plan for the universe hangs on the success of his word. If the preaching of the Word aborts, the purposes of God fail.

But that cannot happen, "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Is. 55:10-11)

God is sovereign. Though he make all his plans hang on the success of his Word proclaimed by men and women, his purposes cannot fail; whenever he wills, his word stands and none can stay his hand. But now we are ready to see the awesome place of prayer.

Not only has God made the accomplishment of his global purposes of salvation hang on the preaching of the Word; he has also made the success of the preaching of the Word hang on prayer. God's goal to be glorified in a world full of white-hot worshippers from every people and tongue and tribe and nation will not succeed without the powerful proclamation of the gospel by people like you and me. And that gospel will not be proclaimed in power to all the nations without the persevering, earnest, global, faith-filled prayers of God's people. This is the awesome place of prayer in the purposes of God for the world. They won't happen without prayer.

How do we know this? We know it by the way the apostle Paul and the Lord Jesus make prayer the servant and power of the ministry of the Word.

Ephesians 6:19: Pray also for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel.

Colossians 4:3: Pray for us also, that God may open to us a door for the Word, to declare the mystery of Christ.

2 Thessalonians 3:1: Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified.

Prayer is the walkie-talkie on the battlefield of the world. It calls in for the accurate location of the target of the Word. It calls in to ask for the protection of air cover. It calls in to ask for fire power to blast open a way for the tanks of the Word of God. It calls in the miracle of healing for the wounded soldiers. It calls in supplies for the forces. And it calls in the needed reinforcements.

This is the meaning of the amazing Word of the Lord in Matthew 9:38. "Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Reinforcements come into the missionary enterprise when the churches know they are in a war, and when they bow down in their trenches with bullets flying overhead and get on their walkie-talkies and cry out for more troops.

This is the place of prayer - on the battlefield of the world. It is a wartime walkie-talkie, not a domestic intercom to increase the comforts of the saints. It malfunctions in the hands of soldiers who have gone AWOL.

I close with a word from the Lord that has pricked my prayer conscience as much as any other. In Luke 18:7-8, Jesus says, "Will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily."

Do you ever cry out to the Lord, "How long, O Lord, how long till you vindicate your cause in the earth? How long 'till you rend the heavens and come down with power on your church? How long till you bring forth victory among all the peoples of the world?" The answer I have heard when I have called on the Lord in this way comes from Luke 18:7 - when his people cry to him day and night for the vindication of his cause among the nations.

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Study Questions:

Write a one-page summary on what you got out of it and how you believe it will apply to your missionary service.