

the role of prayer in mission

Prayer has always played an integral role in seeing lives transformed by Christ. Paul Arnott writes about the experience

Most Christians I know are dissatisfied with the state of their prayer lives and feel they fail to pray as effectively as they should. Yet faithful prayer is crucial to people coming to faith in Christ. Dr Paul Yonggi Cho, who leads the largest Christian church in the world, the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, claims that one of the major factors in 12,000 people coming to faith in Christ each month in his church is ceaseless prayer.

Disciplined, believing prayer has been a key factor in bringing human beings to faith in Christ since God poured out his Spirit on the Church on the day of Pentecost, 21 centuries ago.

Having read Jonathan Edward's call for "a concert of prayer", William Carey, writing in 1792, asserted that united prayer is central to helping achieve God's salvation purposes for the human race: "The most glorious works of grace that ever took place, have been in answer to prayer, and it is in this way, we have the greatest reason to suppose, that the glorious outpouring of the Spirit, which we expect at last, will be bestowed."

Prayer in Biblical history

Intercessory prayer, praying for individuals and for the nations, has for the whole of Biblical history

played an integral role in bringing people and peoples to faith.

Moses is one of the first great examples of intercessory prayer. In Exodus 17:8-13 we find Israel in a pitch battle against the Amalekites. Moses commands Joshua to lead the Israelite army against the Amalekite army in the valley, while he goes to the top of a hill, with his two lieutenants, Aaron and Hur. While the battle rages Moses raises his hands in prayer. While Moses holds up his staff, to intercede on behalf of Israel, they have the advantage; whenever he lowers his hands they begin to lose (Exodus 17:11). Moses' raised staff is a dramatic and concrete symbol of his trust in Yahweh and the dependence of his people Israel.

He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.' " Luke 11:2-4

Intercession is at the heart of Jesus' life and ministry. For him prayer is a dialogue with the Father

and the Spirit. He gets up early and goes to an isolated place to pray (Mark 1:35), he prays before choosing his disciples (Luke 6:12-16), he prays for Peter, that his faith will not fail (Luke 22:32), he prays for us (John 17:20) and he prays when facing the impending horrors of the cross (Matthew 26:39). Jesus prays in the moment of his greatest agony on the cross (Luke 23:34), he teaches his disciples to pray (Luke 11:2-4) and teaches them to continually ask God to send more workers into his harvest (Matthew 9:37-38).

Why pray?

There are those who ask, if God knows what is going to happen anyway, what is the point of praying? However, God's dealings with his people have shown that the faithful prayers of God's people are able to influence the course of human events and history. As Kenneth Leech observes: "Intercessory prayer is not a technique for changing God's mind, but a releasing of God's power through placing ourselves in a relationship of cooperating with God."

So often when, like Moses, we intercede for individuals or situations, things change. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray that God's kingdom "will come on earth as it is in heaven". In Mark 11:23-24 Jesus

CMS Prayer Diary



"We were greatly encouraged at Summer School, when it seemed each year from 1989 (when we returned from Indonesia) until 2002 (when we went to Africa), we would meet someone we'd never met before who'd tell us they had prayed regularly for us all the time we were in Indonesia.

"Now we are encouraged by those who say, 'We pray for you every day / every week / every month as we follow the CMS Prayer Diary.' "

- Noel and Margo Clarke, Kenya

The CMS Prayer Diary is a great tool to help you pray for the world and for missionaries.

extraordinary gift God has given us in prayer.



The Christian prayer group at Jubilee High in Tanzania gathers to pray for the ministry of the school.

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."
Matthew 9:37-38

teaches his disciples: "You can say to this mountain 'may you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and it will happen. I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you have received it, it will be yours."

Having confidence in our prayers

Of course, what we pray for must be in line with God's will, but Jesus promises that if it is in line with his will, it will come to pass. This means that when we pray in any given situation we are to believe that God's will has been done in the lives of those for whom we pray. When we pray for missionaries in a

particular country doing a particular ministry, we are to see the lives of those to whom they minister already conformed to the will of God. For example, when we pray for someone who doesn't know Christ, we are to see them as we are praying, in a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and living the whole of their lives for him.

The apostle Paul demonstrates this principle when he tells the Colossian Christians that with Timothy, he hasn't stopped praying for them since he first heard about their faith in Jesus: "We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then

the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better" (Colossians 1:9-12, NLT).

What an extraordinary gift God has given us in intercessory prayer. May we not take it for granted.

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