

Workers to the Harvest

“Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest that he will send laborers into his harvest” Mat. 9:38. Perhaps the first thing that we should concentrate on is the need for workers. Unfortunately in our day there are more and more workers, and less and less good workers that are truly qualified and doing a good job. So often our modern world has opened up the ministry to being just “another job”, and so many in the ministry work as unsaved secular people would, building groups of people that are undirected, unshepherded, or worse, not even really saved. There is a great need for dedicated men and women that will sacrifice all including their own health, personal wealth, fame, and prestige, even their own expectations of what they will do in the ministry, and go to work in unglorious fields, doing the work of God as God directs and desires.

One of the most important things to remember in regard to your missionaries is that they are just ordinary people with much of the same problems as you or your pastor would have where you live. They get mad, bitter, frustrated, lose their tempers, and sometimes do things or say things that they shouldn't, depending on how they walk with the Lord personally. It is also important to remember that just like you or your pastor, their usefulness in the work of the Lord is directly tied to their personal life, their spiritual life, and their holiness. This is where Satan always attacks and makes them useless for God.

Physical Health

So often missionaries labor in places that are just plain unhealthy, even dangerous. Whereas others enjoy the sanitation of the states, the missionary must live, eat, bathe, sleep, and even get medical and dental attention where the concerns of sanitation are just not high. Stress, long hours of work, problems, and other factors wear the missionary thin, and he must find his rhythm in life and keep it up. Often it is very upsetting to have a full ministry on the field and then have to return to

the US to travel and visit churches, try to raise more support, “start a new life”, and just when you get adjusted anew, it is time to return to the field. In **2 Cor 12:7**, Paul mentions that God gave him a special thorn in the flesh. This irritated and hindered Paul in his service for the Lord, but in the end, Paul got the victory over this problem by understanding and living, *“My grace is sufficient for thee: For my strength is made perfect in weakness” (12:9)*. His point here is that God never took away the problem, but wanted the problem to stay in Paul's life in order to teach Paul that he should lift his eyes above his own problems to fix his gaze on our Lord, and that Paul should depend on God, not on his own strength or powers of prayer before the throne of God. This point of never being overly self-confident and proud is difficult to keep in focus.

Personal Spiritual Life

The quality of ministry a person has depends directly on his relationship with the Lord. It is so important to personally and individually grow spiritually with the Lord every day. Preachers often preach to others (serve the food) but sometimes they forget to “consume” of the word of God for themselves. Wives often work in Sunday School and other ministries, and they end up not being in services where they can grow too. Pray for the personal Bible study and prayer life of your missionaries (not forgetting the wife and children). In Paul's ministry he sought the Lord to direct what he should do and where and how he should do it. This comes only from a good personal relationship with God.

Personal Prayer Life

“Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” Luke 18:1. If it is correct and extremely necessary that people back stateside be constantly praying for their missionaries, it is no less true that that missionary should also be soaking his ministry and life in cleansing prayer before God. It is so easy for ministers to fall into a habit of prayerless service. If we truly want to see the work of the

Lord go forward, prayer for our workers' prayer life should be a constant concern in our prayers.

Family Life

Another area where missionaries are often battling is within their own family. Wives that are not content with the way things go and want to push their husbands into doing what they want (we remember Eva in the garden here), husbands that get irrational or impatient, children that go crazy because of stress or problems. **Col. 3:21** instructs parents to not provoke their children, lest they get discouraged. In **1 Peter 3:7**, after Peter instructs the women to be humble, meek, and submissive to their husbands, he then instructs the men to dwell with them wisely (“according to knowledge”), giving their wives honor or special treatment fine china deserves versus cheap plastic), so “that your prayers be not hindered”. When our family life is in conflict or crisis, our ministry goes south fast. We should pray for family harmony and unity. A stable family life is often the best retreat and refreshment a person can get in this world apart from a good time in the word of God. Pray for their family lives.

Temptation and the Flesh

In **Matthew 4**, Satan led Jesus up to the wilderness to tempt him. No matter what the weakness of a person might be, Satan is always there with that temptation. As humans we never get away from this problem of temptation. The specific temptation may change, but the presence of temptations never goes away. God exhorts us in **Mat. 26:41** to “watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” We must keep a constant, diligent guard against temptation, never letting up. Even when a person is victorious, so often pride and arrogance enter their heart because they are victorious in their Christian life and this prevents humbleness, meekness, and contrition from forming their hearts and blessing their lives.

So many missionaries have simply failed because of temptations, and this has often taken the form of sexual temptations because they are not following the Lord's command in **1 Corinthians 7**, or because other things hinder them from doing what they should be doing in this regard. For others the demands of the ministry are just too much for them, and they decide they want a "regular life" like others have. For others they prefer a "soft job" back in the states. For others money needs cause stress that over time lead to discouragement, frustration, or bitterness, that also trip up many into leaving the ministry.

Conflict and Stress

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. **Romans 12:18**. The ministry in any country is the same, dealing with people's problems in the light of the word of God. The human stubbornness and deviation from God's norms are not limited to one race of people. When confronted with their sin and the word of God, many people will either flee that ministry or oppose it from within. Both cause the missionary great stress, discouragement, and grief of spirit. For some missionaries the solution is to stop preaching strongly the Word of God, to water it down so that it is easier on the people and so that he gets fewer backlashes. This is where the first steps toward neo-evangelicalism, compromise, and sin start. Conflict with other missionaries and coworkers is often a great problem that destroys the ability of a person to serve the Lord with gladness. The missionary must keep **1 Pet 5:7** always before him, *Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.* **Heb. 12:14** *Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*

Biblical Evangelism

"For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" **Acts 20:27**. So often it seems that churches, ministers, and ministries lose their grip on just what is the gospel, and its character of confronting sin. Today the thrust for

success (to get funds from churches) so often causes ministers to water down the gospel to get large crowds and apparent success. Methods are used that are unbiblical, lies become acceptable, and false presentations become common (**Rev. 2:2**). Again here the gospel message is changed by some to be more accommodating, easier to swallow, and to not cause conflict between the minister and individuals that influence his ministry. True Christianity costs us greatly even though it is free. This cost is realized in our lives after we are saved. In **2 Thess. 3:1** Paul asked that others pray that the gospel might have "*free course*", which means to spread unhindered. For a person to truly get saved is a difficult thing. Those that make it easy so often do so by gutting the gospel of its real force (confrontation and victory over sin) and thereby make it another gospel (Galatians 1.6-9).

Discouragement

"Go up and possess it... fear not, neither be discouraged" **Deu. 1:21**. Perhaps the greatest factor that destroys God's servants is discouragement. Simply put, things do not go very well like the minister expects. Evangelism is not producing converts, people who come and supposedly are saved are not serving, giving, or praying, and generally everything goes wrong. We must pray that our ministers keep their eyes focused on the Lord, and keep their lives free from improper goals that we so often set for ourselves. Simply put, it is God who decides how successful you are, and it is not up to you, nor a combination of factors in your life always. Our part is faithfulness, not success. We can hinder God's work, but even if everything is right in the minister's life, things still may not flourish as he wants because it is not God's will in that particular situation, people, or time.

As those who send out our missionaries, we must not neglect our spiritual responsibilities to these people any more than our financial responsibilities.

How to Pray for Missionaries

By David Cox

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"Brethren, pray for us" – Missionary Paul
1 Thessalonians. 5:25

Every true and obedient Christian should be concerned for and striving to labor in the work of the Lord. If the work of the Lord is a war against Satan, then it is only through the prayers of the saints that any Christian warrior can do anything.

Many Christians in the states are highly concerned about advancing the work of the Lord around the world through missions, but they wonder how can I do this best? How and for what should I pray for these warriors on lonely and spiritually dry fields of service so far away? We will try to give some tips that should help.

(The author is a missionary of 20+ years on the foreign mission field, the first 9 years as a single missionary.)