

REFLECTIONS ON SPIRITUAL WARFARE AND FRONTIER MISSIONS

■ This transcript of an address given at the ISFM annual meeting helps us to focus on the relationship between prayer and the least evangelized peoples. Prayer is certainly an underrated strategy in the life and practice of many mission agencies and churches—much to their loss and the loss of the peoples they are trying to reach.

By John Robb, Manny Hooper, and Larry Allmon

Sometimes when you have to make a presentation it nudges you to do something that you wouldn't normally do. That was the case with my look into this issue. I've been very interested in this whole issue of prayer and its relationship to unreached peoples for quite some time but it took this invitation to drive me more deeply into it. As you can see, it's probably a situation of overkill with the amount of materials that I put together. But I couldn't resist it. I felt a lot of this stuff may be of value to you when you go back and have time to read through it.

I'm not going to make any attempt to go through the appendices of my paper this evening. But I want to go through the paper itself and hit some of the key points and then we're going to be proceeding into our time of discussion. Also I have asked two of the society members this evening to take part in this initial presentation and to share briefly with us. So if you'll turn to page one I want to start out just by mentioning the importance of this first case study.

What a classic! The whole experience of J. O. Fraser, the China Inland Mission missionary who at the beginning of this century sought to reach the Lisu tribe—an unreached group in southwest China he labored among for a number of years. I don't know if any of you have read his biography *Behind the Ranges*. Quite a few. Okay, good. He labored for a number of years as a solitary missionary, saw his few converts falling back into demonism and he himself began to come under awful oppression—even to the point of suicidal despair. I can imagine him up there on the edge of

one of those Himalayas thinking, "boy, maybe this is the time. Maybe I should take a leap. Go to heaven."

He got so discouraged but fortunately he didn't give way to that. He wrote home and he said to his mother, "could you gather together some Christian friends and begin to intercede for me and for the Lisu people." The result was that over the next few years an amazing breakthrough began to occur. His wife wrote here on page one a description of his experience. "He described to me how in his early years he had been all but defeated by the forces of darkness arrayed against him. He came to the place where he asked God to take away his life rather than allow him to labor on without results. Then he told me of the prayer forces that took up the burden at home and the tremendous lifting of the cloud over his soul of the gift of faith that was given him and how God seems suddenly to step in, drive back the forces of darkness and take the field."

Have any of you had that experience as missionaries on the field where it seems like the powers of darkness just overwhelm you? I can remember as a, as a young missionary in Malaysia, I felt as though I was in the ring with Mike Tyson. I just felt like I was getting beaten up badly and if it wasn't for the prayer intercessors that were holding us up, I think I would have thrown in the towel and come home.

Prayer is something that I hope to show is an absolutely strategic weapon when we talk about reaching the unreached. Fraser's quote there that I like very much is "work on our knees. I am feeling more and more that it is after all just the prayer of God's people

that call down blessing upon the work, whether they are directly engaged in it or not. Therefore Christians at home can do as much for foreign missions as those who are actually out there." Then he goes into his experience with spiritual warfare and the sense of the enemy working among the Lisu, and wrapping them around with a poison gas so it just made it hard for them to even respond to his efforts. But there was a breakthrough and then hundreds of families accepted Christ and ultimately a people movement began. Tens of thousands came to Christ as well and they became a missionary tribe so it's a great success story in modern missions.

But I wonder what would have happened if Fraser had not managed to get that support group of intercessors together. What if he had not managed to link them in an on-going way by supplying them with current information on the Lisu people, what would have happened? Would the breakthrough have actually occurred? And thinking of the theme of this society struck me—could it be that prayer as perceived and practiced by Great Commission Christians is a crucial missing link in the accomplishment of world evangelization?

And so I want to talk about the nature of prayer a little bit—the importance of prayer and particularly its importance in linking us both to God and to the peoples in the cities and countries that we are concerned with. It really is a linking activity; perhaps more than any other. I like Fraser's quote there that it couples us with the power of God in His almightiness so that He can intervene. So that He can do what we can't do and if we're talking about the

year 2000, you know, it's going to take the Lord and His almightiness to bring that about. It doesn't matter how much we plan and strategize and organize. We can do that "til we're blue in the face" really. It's going to take a great intervention as we were discussing this afternoon.

A. T. Pierson, musing over the failure of his generation to evangelize the world by 1900, attributed that most of all to a lack of prevailing prayer. His words there on page three, "every time a church has set herself to praying there have been stupendous movements in the mission world. If we should but transfer the stress of our dependence and emphasis from appeals to men to appeals to God—from trust in organization to trust in supplication—from confidence in methods to importunate prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit, we should see results more astounding than have been yet wrought." The participants at the Northfield Convention agreed and then about twenty five years later, Jonathan Goforth wrote these words expressing his disillusionment that the Edinburgh Conference on Mission had not really taken hold of this whole issue appropriately. "Listening to the addresses that day one could not but conclude that the giving of the gospel to lost mankind was largely a matter of better organization, better equipment, more men and women. Symptoms indeed were not lacking but a few more sparks might have precipitated an explosion. But no, the dethronement of the idol of ecclesiastical self-sufficiency was apparently too great a price to pay. We still refuse to face the unchangeable truth that 'it is not by might nor by power but by my spirit.'" Well, the whole question of whether prayer became a missing link around 1900 needs to be researched further.

But we still face the danger of falling into that same temptation of thinking if we just got better organized, if we were better coordinated, if we had more resources, if we got better deployed, we could, we could do it. And so I raise the question, "could we and other mission strategists be guilty of treating prayer as if it were a nice add-on to the other "strategic things" we are up to? And could it be that we've ignored the most strategic activity in accomplishing world evangelization?"

Now I really like the way we have stressed prayer here at this conference but this is atypical. At a lot of missions conferences and a lot of big gatherings of church leaders, prayer is de-emphasized.

I want to give some reasons from Scripture, the history of missions, and current missionary experience why I think that prayer is our most strategic weapon in frontier missions. The first is that God desires and requires intercessory prayer for the accomplishment of his salvific purpose for the peoples of the earth. Go down there to the paragraph following after quoting Ezekiel—that famous passage about the Lord looking for an intercessor to stand in the gap so He wouldn't have to destroy the land in judgment. I raised the question, "why does God require and desire intercession?" It's kind of a mystery. You know, why does He do that in His almightiness?

Well, it seems to me—and I don't presume to be a theologian—that God originally gave dominion of the earth to humankind. That dominion has never been revoked. When we are redeemed in Christ we are expected to exercise that dominion through prayer once again. Satan's dominion is really an illegitimate dominion. It's a usurped dominion which took place because of our rebellion. And so it seems to me that as God's redeemed children, when we pray—Jesus said pray that God's will will be done on earth as it is done in Heaven. Not just because it's a nice liturgical thing to do. But because as we pray, Thy will be done here on earth—it opens the door for the Lord to do something. He's given dominion to us and unless we pray, somehow there's a hindrance to the fulfillment of His purpose.

I think of Ephesians 2:2 where it talks about our being seated at the right hand of Christ in the heavenly places and we're joined to Him through prayer. We're joined through the Holy Spirit with the risen Christ and as we pray, we're far above all the other dominions, all the other authorities because we're joined to the one who's got all authority in Heaven and on earth. That's the importance of intercessory prayer and why God requires it of us.

Dick Eastman wowed us at World Vision with his stories of taking inter-

cessors into eastern Europe. At the beginning of 1988—really almost two years before things began to break open—his sense of leading from God was to go and to confront the strongholds of Communism. He got up in the middle of the night and the Lord led him and a German brother to go lay their hands on the wall and say "in the name of Jesus, come down" and we know what happened. He wasn't the only one praying, and he's the first one to say that, but that's the power of intercession. In intercession we're joined to the One who has all authority in Heaven and on earth.

Secondly victory in the spiritual realm is primary and it is won by prayer. I share the story of Moses' intercession, the story of King Jehosaphat, etc.

Thirdly, prayer has always undergirded and extended the missionary outreach for the church. Prayer is mentioned over thirty times in the book of Acts. Generally it's mentioned as occurring before major breakthroughs in the outward expansion of the early Christian movement. I think that's very significant. Also the apostles let it be known what their priority in mission was. What was it? "We will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word." I wonder why they did that? It would have been so easy for them to say, "well, we're going to become the big organizers of the early Christian movement. We're the great strategists. We're going to get it all planned out." Yet prayer was so compellingly important that they delegated the administrative tasks to others.

The whole European side of the modern Protestant missionary enterprise grew out of pietism, a movement that was steeped in prayer. The Moravian movement, which arose from pietism, and the one hundred year prayer meeting the Moravians began got the whole of modern missions off to a start.

I was thinking of William Carey who tried to put all the information about the world and its countries on one homemade map. I was thinking maybe that was sort of the prototype to David Barrett's work—trying to get all the information on one chart. Another interesting thing that I noticed from reading William Carey's biography is that he turned that information into

heartfelt intercession. It wasn't just up there on the wall. I believe it was the research that he had done, the information he gathered, and the fact that he turned it into prayer that really led to the beginning of his own call and involvement in missions—then the missions movement from England which he fathered, on to the Haystack prayer meeting in 1806, and the beginning of the American missions movement.

Robert Glover says "from Pentecost and the Apostle Paul, right down through the centuries to the present day, the story of missions has been the story of answered prayer. Every fresh outbreak of missionary energy has been the result of believing prayer." What a statement!

Fourth, spiritual revivals wrought by prayer have powerfully impacted frontier missions. I want Manny Hooper to come up for a moment and share with us a couple of graphs he's going to put up that show the link between revivals and missions.

Manny Hooper's comments

This is just one single page out of about two or three hundred statistical tables that I have available. If you're interested afterwards you can pick up a copy here.

I believe perhaps the greatest strategy of Satan is to deceive the missionary movement into thinking that we are really wasting our time when we pray and ask God to intervene. In fact, this is the most challenging research I've ever done because I sense not only an intellectual realm but a spiritual realm—a tremendous power of Satan in terms of trying to bring about so many kinds of frustrations and so forth.

This is a table of the all the missionary movements around the year 1900. There are about nine tables all together. If you study the statistics you'll be amazed at what you find. It's the first time anybody ever put those statistics into a computer to discover what really happened. I was amazed in every case. While the numbers of missionaries here is steadily increasing it receives a boost just after the times of spiritual renewal and revival in the sending countries.

Let's ask ourselves a simple

question. Do you know what happens when you have spiritual warfare and there isn't a spiritual awakening? The devil goes to somewhere like Alaska and Hawaii for about two or three days, then comes back to the church. But its like the bird flying across a field of seeds. The seeds are still on the ground. You told the devil to go away but the seeds are still there. That's what happens when people stop praying. He comes right back again. We need to remove the seed from the field.

That's the place of revival—removing sin, bringing confession, conviction of the Holy Spirit. We need nothing short of the power of the Holy Spirit to break the resistance of unreached people groups. Do you know that's the greatest warfare we face now—its the devil convincing us that revival has no relationship to mission. Why? Because he's afraid of this evidence plus much more which clearly demonstrates that the Holy Spirit is the Supreme, the Lord of the harvest. Jesus said, Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest.

Let's remember, Satan is watching

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every step we make. He may know our strategy, but he doesn't know what God is going to do next. That's why he is afraid for us to link up to God. And that is a key to revival and mission together. Let's not say, put aside strategy, and press only for revival. No. Let's link them together like John is saying and we will see a tremendous impact. My conviction is that the greatest impact of missions on the field is through spiritual awakening and revival.

John Robb continues...

By the way, we have his conclusions in about four pages in the appendix for you. Spiritual revival is wrought by prayer and he showed the link between revivals and missions.

Prayer was really the key ingredient that brought the revivals that impacted the missions movement. J. Edwin Orr, has demonstrated that and there are other quotes there.

Intercessory prayer enables God's children to possess their inheritance, the peoples of the earth. That Psalm 2 passage where the Lord says to us, ask of Me and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your possession. That's a tremendous thing—did you ever think about it? The only thing we can take with us into eternity is other people. We can actually take people groups with us in a sense, even though we've never directly had a part.

In the history of missions, the great ingatherings into the church have been linked to strong persistent praying. At least it appears that way. John Hyde is a great example. He was an apostle of prayer who covenanted to pray for one person would come to Christ a day through his work. Four hundred came to Christ that year and then as he grew in faith he doubled it to 800 the following year and then to sixteen hundred, four a day. He prayed for the conversion of outcasts. They were initially very unresponsive, but the missionaries and the national workers prayed and the opposition broke and they began to come to the Lord.

I was talking with Wesley Duwell of OMS International recently and he said the same thing of their work in India where only one church per year was coming into being. They, in heart searching, decided to recruit one thousand people to pray fifteen minutes a day for their work. The difference that made was astonishing and the national workers couldn't even believe the difference. The result was twenty five churches with two thousand believers growing to five hundred fifty churches with more than 73,000 believers. They were doing everything else the same way and he attributes the turning of the tide to the volume of prayer that they marshalled on their behalf. The Korean revival is the same. And the revivals in China with Goforth. You read *By My Spirit*, the book by Jonathan Goforth. It's really something.

Six, effective mission strategies come from research immersed in

prayer. Joshua the researcher who went into the land of Canaan could easily have said "now I know all about those people. We're just going to go in and conquer" but as you read the book of Joshua, he was continually seeking the mind of the Lord. The Lord gave him the strategies so the research facts immersed in prayer is really an unstoppable combination when it comes to reaching the unreached. I recommend to you John Dawson's book, *Taking our Cities for God: How to break spiritual strongholds*.

Seven, prayer is the supernatural way of multiplying and sending out Christian workers into frontier missions.

Number eight, prayer opens closed doors for occupation by a Christian presence. Paul asked the believers to pray "that God may open a door for our message so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ". Don McCurry was recently telling me a neat story about the country of Guinea. He went into this country six years ago and apparently Sekou Toure, the Marxist tyrant had taken over and had thrown all the missionaries out except for two. He was proceeding to torture all his political opponents. They heard the screams in the jail and they said we've got to pray. The three missionaries got together with twelve national workers in a room that day. The room had maps of the countries all around the world with the different ethnolinguistic groups that were still unoccupied with a Christian presence. They prayed for the removal of that tyrant. Within one year he was gone. They prayed that there would be openness for missionary work. The next man very benignly opened up the country for mission agencies. They prayed for each one of these ethnic groups that was unoccupied—laying their hands on the maps. He told me today that every one of those peoples they prayed for is now occupied by a Christian presence—a national church effort or a missionary effort.

I was thinking of the anti-Christian bastions of Romania and Albania. Within the last year the Lord has opened up those countries. Can He not do the same thing in the Middle East? Can He not do the same thing in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Libya, etc.

Lastly, spiritual warfare breaks the

control of the powers of darkness over people groups, cities and nations. This is admittedly kind of a controversial subject in some quarters but I believe it's a subject that the Lord is bringing back into the limelight in the missions movement because they're links that also need to be broken. The links of darkness, the links that tie unreached people groups, cities and countries to principalities and powers. Really we're rediscovering I think in the missions movement that the issue in reaching the unreached is one of spiritual power more than anything else. It's just like the Lord versus the gods of Egypt and Baal. Ephesians 6 says that we're all involved in an unseen world with the powers of darkness. Obviously if we're going to see missionary breakthroughs (page ten the top there) we need to learn how to use that offensive weapon of prayer to dislodge the powers of darkness.

Pete Wagner talks about the receptivity resistance axis and church growth. Some of you are familiar with that. He believes now that through offensive praying, warfare praying, in the binding of these spirit beings that hold groups in bondage that we may actually be able to see that axis changed overnight. They will go from resistance to great receptivity.

The belief systems of pagan peoples bear witness to the Ephesians 6 cosmology. Whether you're in Thailand or Burma or over in Africa, it's a similar hierarchical arrangement of spirit beings over villages, over regions and then over the whole nation. See the appendices where I've put information that bears that out.

Then Japan. I was meeting with some Japanese recently and also some Christian workers there. It was amazing to me how much the Japanese are still bound up in occultism. We wonder why a breakthrough hasn't happened in Japan. Did you know that every school child in Japan carries an amulet and that the great majority of Japanese still go to Shinto shrines and they have Shinto priests dedicate every building? The society is enwrapped with occultism and it has not been broken as yet. I think we can be easily fooled by seeing how modern, how technological, Japan is.

Mark 3:27, is very significant from the standpoint of binding of the

strongman who may be the source of resistance. The people themselves are not resistant. It may be that there's a spiritual strongman that is putting up the resistance and until that being is neutralized we're not going to see a response to the gospel.

I must mention Omar Cabrera, a pastor evangelist in Argentina. I had a chance to be with him in South Africa in October. We were both giving seminars and I went to listen to his and he just blew my mind with his experiences in Argentina with the principalities and powers. He went from pastoring a church of twenty to pastoring a church of one hundred forty thousand—not with a lot of great advertising and slick approach but through the basics of prayer and fasting. He entered areas that he was planning to evangelize but before doing any preaching, he would rent a room and he would pray and fast for a few days. These principalities, these spirit beings, would manifest to him in the process of prayer and fasting. He says that's what really brings it out. You go on their territory. You begin to pray and fast and aggressively go after them and they'll come and they'll say things like "this is my area. You have no right to be here" He said, "no. You've got it wrong. You have no right to be here and I bind you in the name of the one who has all authority in Heaven and on earth." They just go like that and when the top one is gone, he said the mood of the whole town or city changes. Where there may have been resistance before, it's just broken loose and there's just a responsiveness—people by the hundreds and the thousands coming to Christ, extraordinary signs and wonders, miracles of healing, etc.

So it seems to me that this kind of thing, these kinds of experiences that we're trying to catalog around the world are very important for frontier missions—we would do well to apply them to frontier missions.

The final section here is the challenge of linking the global prayer movement with frontier missions. We need to get more specific about praying. We can rejoice in the concern to pray and these global movements that David Barrett has identified. But as I've looked into these movements, the ones I've been able to get some information about, it seems as though there's a very

general focus. There, at this point, is no move to link these intercessors specifically with the three thousand thirty segments of the unevangelized world so that like the prayer partners of J. O. Fraser, they're being linked with updated information and they're able to pray in a persevering way until the hold is broken over that group, until missionaries can go in and do the job of reaping the harvest.

There are great resources in the body of Christ that need to be tapped. We need to set up some practical mechanisms but how do we go about doing that? Now there's some fine models. There is the Global Prayer Digest, the Adopt-a-People effort, and the nonresidential missionary approach of linking praying churches to particular peoples that they're trying to reach. I have case studies of each of these in the appendices.

I want to ask Larry Allmon to come and to say a couple words on his own experience of linking unreached people groups with praying congregations.

Larry Allmon's comments

I think the thing I can add to the discussion to emphasize the power of prayer. Prayer links up with the power of God. It's God who actually does the work. We need not take too much credit for prayer and I want to underscore how God works even when there is minimum prayer.

I'm going to deal with the Jonah-Ninevah phenomena. What God does in response to the simplest prayers is encouraging. We can then move up from there to the higher levels of intercession and prayer but I'm talking down at the bottom where humanly speaking it's a nothing.

Four years ago I began using a new and simple approach when speaking to churches about adopting people groups. I decided not to ask these churches whether or not they wanted to adopt the people—I told them from the pulpit that they would. I gave them the name of a people and I passed out a profile and they had no choice. I have not been criticized for doing it this way nor have I been refused. I've done it to thirty churches and I will do another one Sunday in Aurora, Colorado. They

don't know that yet but they will get a people group to adopt.

Surprisingly enough, with this one sermon minimal-type of presentation, I have seen some phenomenal results. This has to be because of the power of God. And the truth is, when these people find out what prayer actually can do—they're anxious to keep doing it.

So I lay that as a background. This is not a highly sophisticated approach. My people profiles are whipped together very quickly—usually the Saturday night before I have to speak. I grab a *National Geographic*, actually cutting them up which I'm sure I shouldn't do. I xerox copies and type as fast as I can. I pass them out, typos and all, sometimes including funny looking maps and so on. It's nothing fancy but I've gone back to churches years later to find that these people still know who their people group is. I hear consistently, "we have not stopped praying for this people. Have you

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heard any news?" No, have you? Keep praying—someday you'll get the news.

I'm just saying this is at the minimum level of what's happening. We have interesting stories with the Sherpa of Nepal, the Baloch of Pakistan, and many other peoples.

One I'd like to mention is the Yi minority group of China. Four years ago I spoke to the Solanco Bible Church. Anybody ever been to the Solanco Bible Church? It's one of your megachurches of about two hundred members in southern Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. I gave them a people group I picked out of the *National Geographic* real quick—the Yi people of China. I thought it was simple enough for them to remember and simple enough for me to remember. I gave my sermon, had a good time with the congregation and then was on my way. I didn't contact that church for three years. That was

four years ago.

A year ago, they asked me to come back (which was an encouragement). When I got back to that church they told me what they had done with the Yi people. I was awed. Awed! They had the *National Geographic* map with China's minority groups in the front lobby of their church. They had circled the Yi. They had arrows and flags and streamers and every Sunday School child in that church knew about the Yi people. They have gone to the National Geographic Society themselves to do the research. They've gone to the library. One old man came up to with his Bible, opened it up to this little scrap of newspaper and said, "did you know there was a train wreck in China in the Yi area. What do you think?" I had no clue.

Some of them had been to Orlando, Florida to the Epcot center. They said to me, "did you know we saw Yi in the Epcot." And I said, "you did? I mean I've seen it five or six times, I never saw any Yi. I just saw China and boats and things."

They know the Yi people—they know about as much as anybody could know while living in south Lancaster County. I was able to tell them last year that the first Yi pastor had been ordained (I found this in the latest OMF reports). Oh, they were excited. I said "you're

not finished praying. We've got to have a whole church—not just a pastor!"

Just last week I read the latest OMF newsletter. Official Beijing government data, a People's Republic of China statistic, says there are over a hundred thousand Christians among the Yi! Wait until the Solanco people hear that one. I'm really excited now to tell them "okay, maybe you can put that one on your second plate and take a new group." Whatever they're doing in Solanco Bible Church, they're doing it right. It may seem small as we see it but it was enough for God to move and do a great thing. And that's not the only story. The other stories we haven't heard about yet and they'll be a lot of them. I'm convinced of that as you simply touch the throne with some focus on one of these forgotten, hidden, frontier, unreached groups and pray, the Lord of the Harvest does the rest.