

SEVEN WAYS TO PRAY FOR YOUR MISSIONARIES

Missions is more than God's people obediently serving him. Missions is God at work. If he isn't working in and through his people to accomplish his purposes, nothing eternal is getting done. Think of Paul at Philippi in Acts 16. He was faithfully teaching about Jesus when Lydia believed. God led the missionary to the right place, empowered his witness and opened the heart of the hearer. In Matthew 9:36-38, Jesus looked at the multitudes and their unmet needs and said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few." Jesus compared the huge task of meeting the crowd's needs with the few people there are to do the job. Denis Lane describes this situation in his booklet *God's Powerful Weapon* as "facing an impossible task with an inadequate force." What is to be done in this tragic situation? Jesus answers, "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field." The solution is to ask God to touch hearts and challenge his people to work the harvest.

Unleashing God's Power

The Apostle Paul was a great missionary who often urged God's people to pray for him. He linked the success of his mission to the faithful prayer support of the saints of God. Notice 2 Corinthians 1:8-11. "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. In our hearts, we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many" (NIV).

Paul describes some of his experiences as: "hardships we suffered," "under great pressure," "beyond our ability to endure," and "despaired even of life." Yet he speaks confidently of God's deliverance. Paul is sure that God will sustain him as the believers help in prayer. This passage shows that God actively protects, delivers and uses us for blessing. And prayer links us to the most exciting aspects of ministry. Paul says, "many will give thanks ... for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many." There is an inseparable link between prayer and effective missions. The place God wants you in his missions program is something wonderful that you must discover from him. But it is his will that you, a child of God, pray for world evangelization. We don't dare sidestep this opportunity and responsibility. Pray. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and "You should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1b).

Pray on Two Levels

Here are two suggestions to help you pray more effectively:

1. Maintain a broad general interest in missions around the world. Keep up with missionaries in various countries. Pray for them and your church's missionaries each day. Some people pray for a different continent every day of the week.
2. Pray regularly for one missionary or a missionary family. After you've cultivated your interest worldwide, narrow in and specialize your concern in one particular outreach. Ask God to put one specific missionary on your heart and commit yourself to that missionary in a deep, meaningful way. As God leads you, make a definite commitment to him to pray daily for your partner in ministry. This special connection to another ministry holds all the mutual benefits of deep and purposeful friendship. Learn all you can about your missionary: the family, the agency (subscribe to their magazine), the country where he is serving, the type of work he does, the people he is working with. Assume some responsibility in your friendship with your missionary and write regularly. Send small gifts occasionally. Have him in your home. Read his prayer letters fresh from the mailbox and pray through them many times. Let your mind expand on the items mentioned and pray in depth for him. Rejoice with your missionary in his answers to prayer. Worship God with thanksgiving for meeting your missionary's needs. It's not easy to pray for someone every day for an extended period of time. No matter how strong your commitment, the old "out of sight, out of mind" will factor in. After praying every day for several weeks, it's easy to resort to "God bless so-and-so in Japan. Amen." Guard yourself against this and ask God to help you pray intensely, intelligently and with his Spirit's power. To keep your intercession fresh, vital and directed to specific needs, use this weekly cycle of prayer topics each day.

DAY 1 - RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Too often we assume that missionaries don't struggle like we do in their relationship with God. But this is the missionary's primary need. Pray that your missionary will:

- Love and study God's Word.
- Have a strong prayer life.
- Be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Be maturing spiritually.
- Make progress over personal sin.

DAY 2 - PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Satan often discourages us through our physical and emotional lives. Many missionaries live in difficult climates filled with disease. Pray for good health. With busy and hectic schedules, missionaries travel often. Pray for safety, stamina and a sense of priority. Remember that preventive prayer helps. When we hear that a missionary is hospitalized for a heart attack, disease or has been injured in an accident, we pray up a storm. The wise thing is to cover your missionary's health continually. Pray against discouragement, loneliness and depression.

DAY 3 - FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Pray for family relationships—husband/ wife, parent/child. Pray for the children, their salvation and spiritual growth, their health and education. Pray too that their family life will provide an excellent model for local Christians and the unsaved. And pray against the temptations that destroy families. If your missionary is single, pray that God will meet his or her needs in this area. Pray for strong, healthy friendships and contentment in singleness.

DAY 4 - ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE

In world evangelization communication is crucial. Your missionary is in ministry to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Whether your missionary is communicating with his life or lips, he must be understood. Learning a new language and adapting to a new culture are frustrating, difficult and essential to good communication. Languages in the Far East are among the most difficult for a Westerner to master. Even an elementary knowledge of a language takes years of study and practice. And a superficial understanding is insufficient for communicating spiritual truths and defending the faith. Would you listen to a speaker who wasn't fluent in English? But to really communicate, the missionary must adapt culturally to identify with those he is trying to reach. Getting close to the local people and understanding them means adjusting lifestyle and cultural preferences. Pray that your missionary will have the stamina and understanding to demonstrate Christ cross-culturally.

DAY 5 - EFFECTIVE MINISTRY

Sometimes you can forget why your missionary is overseas, and why you are praying for him. Remember to pray for what your missionary is actually doing: witnessing, visiting, teaching, preaching, counseling, nursing—and pray for the people he is ministering to. Prayer letters will teach you how to specifically pray for these things. But include requests for boldness, open doors, open hearts and excellence in the effort. Most of all, ask the Holy Spirit to empower your missionary for productivity. (See John 15:16.)

DAY 6 - TEAM RELATIONSHIPS

Your missionary is probably not completely on his own. Normally, missionaries team up with other missionaries, local believers, pastors and evangelists. Unfortunately, this mix of personalities designed to strengthen the ministry can sometimes be used of Satan to weaken it. Poor team relationships can spoil the work. Pray for all the fellow workers your missionary mentions in his letters. Pray they appreciate and sharpen one another in good and healthy ways.

DAY 7 - COUNTRY OF SERVICE

Expand your praying to include the entire country where your missionary is located. The political situation, the government and its leaders, visas, freedom to preach the gospel—all of these are important factors in world evangelization. You can also pray that the whole country will open up in responsiveness to the gospel. Whether you use this guide

regularly or use some other method, you can never run out of prayer material. We haven't even mentioned your missionary's relationship with his home churches, the parents and family left at home and his financial needs. You have plenty of important work to do in giving the world the message of Jesus Christ. And you will know God better for it. No matter how many times you may fail in your daily commitment, you can start again today.