

David Garrison

Extraordinary Prayer

Prayer permeates Church Planting Movements. Whether it's Koreans rising at four in the morning for a two-hour prayer time, or Spanish Gypsies "going to the mountain," as they call their all night prayer vigils, Church Planting Movements are steeped in prayer.

Consequently, prayer has become the first priority of every Church Planting Movement strategist. As soon as a Strategy Coordinator senses the gravity of his calling he immediately falls to his knees and prays, "Oh God, only You can make this happen."

We've identified seven distinct roles that prayer plays in the life of a Church Planting Movement. In Church Planting Movements prayer occupies both intuitive and counter-intuitive roles.

Intuitive roles of Prayer

#1. Prayer for the missionaries. Missionaries to the world's unreached people groups are invading hostile territory. Many of these unreached peoples have spent centuries, even millennia, under the dominion of 'the god of this world' and he does not surrender them lightly. Missionaries engaged in Church Planting Movements have come under severe attack on a spiritual level. Their health, their family members, and their vocation are all subject to attack by Satan. Praying for them is the best defense they have.

#2. Prayer for the lost people group. One of our missionary leaders serving in Africa commented on a major goal he'd achieved that was yielding great results. "For years," he said, "our missionaries have had churches praying for them. Now, they are shifting the focus of prayer

onto the lost people they are trying to reach."

This shift has been pronounced across the evangelical world. For years, it has been commonplace for Christians to tag onto their prayers: "and God bless the missionaries." While Christians continue to pray for missionaries, they are increasingly pouring out their hearts for the Kurds, Mongols, Uighurs, or Uzbeks. People groups who have never been prayed for in all of history are now being lifted up before the throne of God.

Counter-Intuitive Roles of Prayer

#3. Prayer modeled by the missionaries and church planters. We often underestimate the way our actions overshadow our words. Only

I'm sometimes asked by faithful prayer warriors, "Do my prayers make a difference?" I love to tell them of people like Ibrahim. Ibrahim was a young convert from Islam that I met deep in inner Asia in 1990. He was the first of his people group to come to faith in Christ. I remember how his face glowed with the radiance of the Holy Spirit in his life. I asked one of the church planters working in the area how they had led Ibrahim to Christ.

"We didn't," they said. "He came to faith through prayers."

"I don't understand," I said.

The church planter explained, "Ibrahim is a student at the university where I teach. He is the son of a mullah (Muslim religious leader). We normally stay away from people like him. But one day Ibrahim came to me and told me of a dream he'd had. In his dream an old man handed him a book and said, 'Read this.' Ibrahim asked me if I knew what the book in his dreams might be. Apparently he'd been asking his friends the same question because the dream had haunted him for weeks. His friends had always pointed him to the Qur'an, but Ibrahim said, 'No. It's not the Qur'an.'"

The church planter hesitated and then spoke softly, "In my drawer I had a tattered copy of the New Testament. It was written in the old script that most of Ibrahim's people could no longer understand so I had never used it in witnessing to them. I hesitated, but then sensed God wanted me to take a risk with this mullah's son. I showed it to Ibrahim. 'Could this be the book?'"

Ibrahim opened the book and said, "Ah, I see it is in the old script. My father taught me how to read this. Do you mind if I borrow it?"

Over the next few weeks Ibrahim read all of it and led himself to faith in Christ."

We both knew that the true source of Ibrahim's conversion could only be found in the many saints who had prayed for so long for Ibrahim's people.

when prayer comes to characterize the life of the missionaries and church planters, does it spread to their team members and to those they are trying to reach. If prayer doesn't characterize the missionary's life then the new believer will not grasp the true source of the missionary's life-changing power. He will either view the missionary as an extraordinary person whom he could never imitate, or worse, a secular person whom he would not wish to imitate.

#4. Prayer for the new believers. In the course of Church Planting Movements no one suffers as much as the first converts into the movement. Missionary newsletters are filled with pleas for churches to pray for Amal who has been imprisoned or Mohammed whose family threatened to kill him. New Church Planting Movements often pass through a crucible of testing in which the first believers are harassed and even killed. If the church survives this initial testing then a Church Planting Movement is not far behind. If Satan can crush the first fruits, then the Church Planting Movement will die.

#5. Prayer by the new believers. In every Church Planting Movement powerful prayer flows through the lives of the believers and their churches, as God's mighty activity flows through their lives. Vices are broken, diseases are healed, opposition is crushed, and lives are changed. Often the prayer was accompanied by a strong sense that God has his hand on this people. It is their time—their appointed day of salvation. This creates a powerful force within a people. They witness with boldness, sensing that God is on their side. They don't flinch under persecution, confident that God is with them.

Finally, we discovered that there were some collateral benefits that emerge from prayer in a Church Planting Movement, benefits we had not anticipated finding, but they have emerged as key factors in the success of many Strategy Coordinators' work.

#6. Prayer between partners. Strategy Coordinators in Church Planting Movements invariably have wide networks of partners who come from all over the world. How do they develop such close bonds so quickly that overcome enormous barriers of language, culture, and even theology? The secret is prayer. Strategy Coordinators pray for partners and pray with partners. The call to prayer for an unreached people group is the magnet that first draws these diverse partners together, and the glue that bind them over the years.

#7. Prayer for more workers. Jesus commanded us to "Pray to the Lord of the harvest to call out workers." Prayer mobilizes harvesters to come to join the work. More importantly, though, prayer summons new workers to emerge from within the harvest. At the same time, it creates a sense of expectancy on the part of the missionaries and church planters

to be watchful, always looking for the new harvesters, the co-laborers that God is raising up. These new co-laborers will take up the mantle of leadership within the movement and propel it to the next level.

We pray because our vision exceeds our abilities. Prayer is the soul's deepest cry of rebellion against the way things are, seeing the lost of this world and crying out, "This does not glorify God, and so, by God's grace, it must change!" Prayer comes from God and ascends back to God on behalf of those who do not know God. Extraordinary prayer lays a firm foundation for a Church Planting Movement.

*Excerpt from Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World by David Garrison. Available now at www.freshwinddistributing.com
Reprinted with Permission*