

Chapter 12

Prayer for Movement Catalysts

Prayer for Apostolic Agents and Their Disciple-making Prayers *

Preview

Fifteen apostolic agents representing much fruit over many generations gathered for a four-day retreat to study prayer from the Bible and to pray. God renewed their conviction that movements depend on the work of disciple-making prayers centered on God's desire to disciple the nations.

One Bible topic was prayer requests for apostolic agents themselves, for those who work towards God's vision to have disciples in all people groups. This encouraged field workers to ask for prayer for themselves. Field workers shared with one another how they mobilize prayer for the movements they lead. Sharing answers to prayers infused each one with a fresh confidence to expect our Father to answer and to see His power generating movements.

Word Reflection

The dominant models of Biblical prayer which underpinned the development of first century movements were prayers that moved believers toward maturity, and prayers for apostolic agents who initiated broad disciple-making. Stop to consider these prayer themes for a moment; they are very different from the typical prayers one hears.

A recent gathering of field workers discovered how few times in the Bible there are prayers for unbelievers. When they realized how many New Testament prayers are requested for apostolic agents, the air was thick with emotions. The apostle-like field workers shed tears and shared their burdens. Apostolic agents in movements today often pray for others, but rarely ask for prayer for themselves or for their ministries. These men were touched by Paul's prayer requests for himself because their own burdens are of the same kind and just as heavy. They were also touched because God was giving them phenomenal open doors for the further advance of the gospel. God highlighted the strategic importance for them to request prayer for themselves as apostolic agents. When we study prayer in the Bible, we begin to understand that prayer is not what we do before or after we work, but prayer itself is "work"—a kind of work through which God uses us to raise up apostolic agents and make disciples.

7 Strategic Prayer Requests for Apostolic Agents

ESV 2 Corinthians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶ If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you

patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. ⁷ Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. ⁸ For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. ¹¹ You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

*ESV **Romans 15:30** I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, ³¹ that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³² so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.*

An apostolic agent's burdens can be very heavy. They brought Paul to the point of depression, and he even despaired of life itself. God allowed such heavy burdens to teach him a critical lesson—dependence on God rather than on himself. Apostolic agents can be very self-confident, but as their fruit increases, they become more burdened and more humbly dependent on God.

In the 2 Corinthians passage, the apostle shared the answer to his desperate prayer—that God had delivered him—with those who had prayed for him and asked distant believers to **keep praying four (of seven) strategic prayers for apostolic agents:**

1) Deliverance from heavy ministry burdens: The apostle was thinking not only of getting out from under the burden, but also *of his increased ministry because the burden was eased.* For then he would be better able to comfort others (1:6-7), and work with them for their joy (1:24). Looking beyond his own wider ministry, the apostle thought of how many *believers would be thankful, when their prayer for him was answered.*

One day an apostolic agent named "Johny" was struggling with the speedy increase of the fruit of his ministry. Though joyful, he was overwhelmed because he couldn't keep up with his part. In answer to prayer, some friends coached him for a couple of hours, helping him identify key local leaders that he could train and trust to lead parts of the ministry. Once he trained these people, they relieved him of a share of his ministry load. And far beyond his expectations, in the next three years,, they spread the gospel to many other Unreached People Groups.

2) Protection from evil opponents: Paul asked prayer for himself, not only for the sake of his own comfort, but for the sake of the kingdom, for the advance of the kingdom and those who were saved, and also for those that he invited to participate with him in his work. Those who prayed for him would join in rejoicing with the same rewards, the blessings of answered prayer and fruitfulness.

One day a church planter named "Gus" had an appointment to meet a key local leader. Together they had been invited to bring the gospel to a group of people who are normally very opposed to the gospel, they were very excited. A traffic jam prevented Gus from arriving at

their meeting point on time. The local leader was impatient and left without him. But a trap had been set up. These enemies of the gospel were waiting in a wooded area, knocked the local leader off his cycle, and killed him. In his sadness over the death of this new local leader, this apostolic agent realized that God had used a traffic jam to protect his life from an unknown plot against him. He had often prayed that God would protect Him, though protection by God allowing a traffic jam was not what he had imagined.

3) Acceptance of his ministry by believers: One of the great challenges of the apostolic leader is opposition from within the established church itself. This is because an apostolic agent is non-conventional; his work is to go beyond what the church is doing presently. Paul had known this pain and turmoil during his experience at the Jerusalem council.

One of our activists named "Johny" was opposed by his conventional church denomination because he baptized the people he discipled, though the denomination had not ordained him to baptize. This was very upsetting, because the denominational leaders admitted that scripture did not support their tradition of limiting who may baptize. When Johny submitted his resignation letter, the area leader visited him to say he was on his side, to be patient, and did not accept his resignation. Some years later, this church planter now has great influence in the denomination. He was recently chosen as their leader for the province.

4) Mutual refreshment from visiting distant believers: Paul's prayer requests spanned large geographic areas, so that many disciples of Christ might benefit. He asked prayer that when he visited, believers and himself would be mutually refreshed.

When one of our coworkers named "Paul" left to equip our leaders on a distant island, he looked very exhausted. So, after his arrival on that island by plane, we prayed for him during his arduous travel over many hours of badly maintained roads. He returned very refreshed and inspired by the dedication and faithfulness of a saint, a woman who had suffered greatly at the hands of her relatives because of her faith; yet she had only increased in zeal after her suffering. She had become a leader of clusters of believer groups that had grown very broadly under her mentoring. His hair stood on end on his arms while he told me her story, and also about how the leaders there had covered many of the expenses of his trip, due to their growth in maturity.

In the next passages, we see the remaining three of seven strategic prayers for apostolic agents:

*^{ESV} **Colossians 4:3** At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison-- ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*

*^{ESV} **Ephesians 6:19** and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*

Paul sent these prayer requests from prison, for through prayer, he knew his spirit was not imprisoned. He requested prayer for:

5) Open doors for the gospel. Suffering for Jesus had not dampened Paul's spirit enough to stop preaching the gospel. He asked for prayer that God would give him opportunities.

Several years ago, "Paul's" quarterly report unexpectedly decreased in size. I suspected he had lost some of his fruit reports indicating where his believer groups were, but he couldn't remember which fruit charts had been lost. We prayed about it and left it with God. Three years later, his car needed a repair in a city four hours away from his own. While he waited for his car, another man was also waiting for his car to be repaired. The man (named "Chris") started sharing the gospel with Paul. Paul found the way Chris shared the gospel interesting; it was like the way Paul presented the gospel. So Paul asked Chris about his mentor, whom he called "Hank." Suddenly Paul remembered that he had not heard from Hank, a leader he had mentored, for three years. Could this be the same Hank, the squatter who led the recyclers down by the river? It turned out that this Hank was the same Hank he had lost track of years earlier, and that Chris, who was evangelizing him because he didn't know him, was his own spiritual grandson! When he visited Chris and saw his ministry, Paul found 500 believers under Chris' mentoring. These were Paul's unknown great-grandchildren! Chris helped Paul regain contact with Hank, who had been forced by the government to re-locate to another island. Paul learned that Hank had developed much fruit on that distant island, more than 300 believers in two new Unreached People Groups! What looked like obstacles to the gospel—lost fruit reports, forced relocation, and lost contact—turned out to be for the progress of the gospel in answer to prayer!

6) Clear presentation of the gospel. *One of our movement activists named "Les" felt very sad because we had run out of money to help earthquake victims rebuild their homes. One of those whom we were unable to help ("Sur") had lost a child, badly injured his foot, and lost his home. Les prayed about Sur's need for a home and then talked to all the international agencies asking for funds. Only one agency had any money left, and their program was only to build high quality bathrooms. Les obtained a 5-star bathroom to attach to Sur's bamboo shack with an uneven dirt floor. When finished, this very spacious bathroom not only had concrete floors and walls, but high quality paint on the walls, tile on the floor, and excellent lighting—it was truly a 5-star bathroom! In fact, the light was the best they had, so Sur's family put a comfortable chair in the bathroom and used it as a reading room! Attaching a 5-star bathroom to a simple bamboo shack was so ridiculous to local Javanese that this story was talked about widely in the area. One day Les asked Sur why he had received the bathroom, and Sur had no answer. So Les described the way the 5-star bathroom came to him as an extreme demonstration of grace—it was so undeserved and so unexpected, and of such high quality, that all they could do was receive it and be grateful. From this starting point, Les went on to explain Jesus' gospel of grace—and he led Sur to the Lord during that dialog! Who could have imagined that a 5-star bathroom would become the opportunity for a clear presentation of the gospel, such that it became Sur's doorway into the Kingdom of God! This kind of thing only happens from answered prayer.*

7) Boldness to proclaim the gospel. While suffering in prison for the gospel, Paul asked for prayer so that his experience in prison would not dampen his boldness for proclaiming the gospel.

I have close friendships with two movement activists who have spent time in prison because of the gospel. God gave them great boldness to proclaim the gospel inside those prisons. He gave them the courage, and the right words. Their boldness resulted in a movement in that Unreached People Group in the nine years after their imprisonment.

Do you see how strongly prayers are oriented around God's agenda to disciple the nations?

An Apostolic Agent Mobilizes Prayer Behind Movements

During our prayer retreat, apostolic agents told one another many diverse stories about how they mobilized prayer for the movements they led. Practical wisdom is needed to mobilize prayer among Cousins. It must be done carefully due to security risks. The distribution of prayer requests should be done through multiple trusted people so that tracking of phone calls cannot be centralized. It should be done via secure text messaging when personal communication is not possible. Only initials or pseudonyms should be used to represent people and places. A fruitful lead worker should use coordinators so the burden of distributing requests is shared among a team of people and doesn't fall heavily on his shoulders. The following story illustrates the effort apostolic agents expend so that a dedicated team of people is praying for multiplying disciples in movements.

Zed is an apostolic agent with much fruit in three provinces; each is led by a regional coordinator. The three regional coordinators are joined by the facilitator of a group of praying widows, and these four make up Zed's core team of prayer coordinators.

They call their prayer system the "Seventh Division," partly because the number seven points towards God. The goal of the Seventh Division is to mobilize all believers in prayer. Each of the three regional coordinators links to seven prayer teams, each consisting of seven families. These in turn link to other believer groups, and these to other believer groups, in a multi-layer system. The facilitator of widows coordinates four prayer teams of widows. These are considered particularly high value because widows can take more time to pray according to the Bible. These prayer teams pray for four general categories of prayer: 1) Penetration of the gospel into new regions, 2) Empowerment of local leaders, 3) Equipping of believer groups, and 4) Special requests. An example of special requests in a certain month was their prayer for breaking of the fast events occurring during Fasting Month. A reflection from the Bible called "True Fasting" is shared, and new groups are started. This approach gains special prayer backing.

An Answered Prayer

Our first passage above, 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, speaks of an apostolic agent's burdens which can be so heavy that they bring him to the point of despairing of life. After reflecting on this passage with others, Zed told a story which touched us all about our Father's special care for Zed as well as for those who had never heard the gospel.

"I was riding my motorcycle, starting the three-hour trip home at about 9:00 at night. I was exhausted from several long days of ministry, and just wanted to be home. I was driving on a road with no lights and no sign of houses. It was a very long stretch of very lonely road. A thought popped into my mind, "If I were to get a flat tire here, there

would be no way to get it repaired". Almost immediately, my tire went flat. I pulled over, in the blackness, parked my cycle, and laid down on the side of the road. I was feeling so sorry for myself, I began to cry while praying, I was in a weakened place emotionally. I cried until I fell asleep. Sometime later, I was aroused from my sleep by someone shaking me, "What's wrong?" "My tire is flat." He handed me his two sickles. This simple farmer had been cutting something; I don't know where he came from. Without another word, he began pushing my motorcycle down a footpath through the dark forest, up and down for an hour while I followed with his sickles. Finally, we came to a dark house and he yelled from the yard, "This man has a flat tire." Then he took his sickles and walked down the path, leaving me behind. A man came out of the house with two broken pieces of metal, some liquid, and a piece of cloth, and went to a fire in the backyard. He heated up the metal, used a nail to stuff some cloth with a liquid into the hole in the tire, then alternately applied the liquid then the hot metal several times. After he was confident that the hole had been patched and dried, he pulled a bicycle pump out of his house. We took turns pumping up my motorcycle tire with that little pump. It took forever!

Late that night, I found myself driving down the road again. Though I held my breath, the tire held air all the way home. I marveled at God's ability to answer prayer for a tire repair, in the most unlikely place, with the most unlikely tools and workman, in the middle of a dark night. On another occasion, I returned to visit the tire repairman in the middle of the woods, shared the gospel with him, and he and his family were baptized. He shared his new faith with others living in the area, then several other families came to faith and joined a believer's group that he leads. We helped him with a microloan so he could set up a tire repair business. Now he has better tools, has set up a bamboo frame stand on the side of the road, and his income is much stronger. I marvel at how the new believer groups in the area have grown. I now understand the reason God allowed me to have a flat tire in the middle of the night on a lonely road. My problem that night could only be resolved by God, as I depended on Him in prayer. God allowed my need, and then resolved it after I prayed, to build both my faith and the faith of many new believers in that region. And through Zed's story, God wants to build your faith too!

Summary

Field workers regularly spend extended time together in prayer during each quarterly retreat. On one retreat, we discussed how each leader designed their prayer systems in the movements each one was leading. We made prayer the only topic of that quarterly retreat, and God deeply refreshed and encouraged us through it. The sharing of heavy burdens in prayers helped us center again on the power of God to do what we can't imagine. This bolstered our faith. Our study of seven strategic prayers for apostolic agents was laden with emotions when they realized that their burdens were very similar to the apostle Paul's, and God was just as able to answer their prayer requests. They reflected more deeply on how movement leadership should design prayer systems to mobilize teams of dedicated people praying for God's movements.

Follow-up Questions for Field Activists

1. “Seven Strategic Prayers for Apostolic Agents” is one of the prayer categories which emerged in a biblical study of prayer behind movements. What have you done to design systems in which people listen well to the prayer requests of apostolic agents? How are you mobilizing prayer for the movement to which you are linked?
2. A second key topic of prayer in the Bible is to pray with confidence in the certainty that our Father answers the prayers of His children. How have you set up the sharing of answered prayer to increase faith in our Father?
3. To help you go more deeply into this topic, I have written a Bible study series entitled **God’s Grace for the World: A Biblical Guide to Prayer Behind Movements**, as an ebook. You can use it as a guide as you pray for movements.

* by Trevor Larsen and team, for more info, see www.focusonfruit.org