

# Prayer Support

Neal Pirolo

Emmaus Road International

*Supporting a missionary involves much more than money.  
Are you ready for the adventure?*



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*Serving as Senders Today* emphasizes the importance of a team of support for cross-cultural workers, highlighting six areas of care:

- **Moral support**—being their encourager in whatever ways you can
- **Logistics support**—dealing with details so they don't have to
- **Financial support**—sharing resources to help meet their needs
- **Prayer support**—supplication, intercession, and thanksgiving for them and with them
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### **Emmaus Road International**

7150 Tanner Court

San Diego, CA 92111

(858) 292-7020

Emmaus\_Road@eri.org

www.eri.org

### **ERI Resources**

(702) 538-7976

orders@eri.org

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# Prayer Support

*“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.”*

Ephesians 6:18a

IN 1923 HELEN MOLLENKOF, a young teenager, attended a Keswick Conference in New Jersey. The speaker was L. L. Legters, who along with Cameron Townsend many years later would found Wycliffe Bible Translators.

God had given Legters a deep burden for all the indigenous people of Mexico and Central America who had no Bible in their own language. Speaking at the Keswick Conference, he challenged the young people to take the name of one language group in Mexico and pray for that people—that God would open the doors so His Word could be translated into the language of their heart.

Helen was one of those who answered the challenge. She stepped forward and picked the name of a people she'd never heard of before: the Mazahua. She wrote the name on the flyleaf of her Bible. Then, closing her eyes, this teenaged girl promised the Lord she would pray for them until they had the Bible translated into their own language.

Helen went ahead with life. She graduated from school, became a nurse, and joined the Women's Union Missionary Society. She was then sent to India, where she served as a missionary for the next thirty-five years. One of her ongoing prayer concerns was for the Mazahua people.

In 1967 Helen returned to the States to retire in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Some time later, for some unexplained reason, she felt free to stop praying for the Mazahua people.

In 1981 she picked up her local newspaper and read an interview with Pat Hamric who, like herself, was a long-term missionary. As she read she discovered to her amazement that Pat, along with Hazel Spotts and Don and Shirley Stewart, had been Bible translators among the Mazahua people.

Overjoyed, she found Pat's address and wrote to her: "I think you might be interested in my contact with the Mazahua Indians through prayer."

She told Pat about the Keswick meeting, how L. L. Letgers had challenged them to take the name of one language group in Mexico, and her commitment to pray.

Pat replied, "The New Testament is complete. It was dedicated in January of 1970!"

Helen realized that January 1970 was the very time the Lord lifted her burden to pray!

In 1972, a woman opened her World Atlas to the Middle East and began praying for a city not far from Tehran, Iran. Through the years there were other prayers, for sure. Always on her heart, however, was the spiritual welfare of this city. Years later, a national from that county came to her church in America. After the service, she dashed over to him. "Where are you from in Iran?" she asked.

He replied, "You won't have heard of it; it is an insignificant city," but he shared the name of the town.

"I've been praying for that city for 34 years!" she blurted out through tears of joy.

"Thirty-four years?" the Iranian brother asked incredulously. "I got saved 34 years ago. I now lead 400 believers in the city."

What powerful testimonies of the significance of prayer in God's global plan! A plethora of articles and books abound on the topic of prayer. A Google search will yield an endless list.

What is the sum of their message? The words of Augustine may summarize, "Without God, we cannot; but without us, God will not."

In His sovereignty, God has voluntarily linked Himself to human cooperation. He has inextricably bound Himself to the prayer of faith of His children. He merges His working with man's praying.

Though this is a deep mystery, it is clearly revealed in the Word and throughout history. Joshua's day in battle would have gone poorly without Moses' prayer (Exodus 17). Jacob's place in Israel's history would not have been the same without Penuel (Genesis 32). The cross would have been intolerable without Gethsemane (Luke 22).

Today one can stand in the bedroom where John Wesley and the members of the “Holy Club” held their prayer meetings, a force God used to ignite a revival that was felt around the world. Consider Evan Roberts and his friends prostrating themselves before the Lord night after night, resulting in the Welsh Revival. Consider the Prayer Mountain in Seoul, Korea, which gave impetus to the growth of several of the largest churches in the world. And the revival that swept Brazil was evidenced by extra police being put on duty to control traffic in several major cities on prayer meeting night! Following that revival, the Church in Brazil is now a leading missionary sending force.

Prayer initiatives of each succeeding generation point to the vitality of intercession. In no greater arena of human activity is this mysterious union of our prayer and God’s work seen than in the mission of the Church.

Jesus was going about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, but when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is great, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into His harvest.” Three verses later, He sent them out two by two (Matthew 9-10)!

At the end of time, Christ the Lamb will be extolled: “You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9). The twenty-four elders singing this new song will be holding golden vials full of incense, which are the *prayers of saints* (Revelation 5:8)! Some of those are the prayers you are praying for your missionary!

Paul in his masterful Ephesians 6 discourse on spiritual warfare not only clearly described the armor for our protection in war, but also identified two of the major weapons of our warfare: the Sword of the Spirit and spiritual prayers. His urgency was expressed: “*Praying always with all prayers and supplication in the Spirit.*”

As a missionary of the first century, he was continually calling on the churches for prayer support: “Brethren, pray for us” he simply stated in 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Hebrews. His appeal to the Christians in Rome seemed a bit more pressing: “I beseech you, brethren... that you *strive* together with me in your prayers to God for me” (Romans 15:30). Paul

assumed Philemon was on his prayer support team (Philemon 22). To the church in Philippi, he stated his confidence that what he was experiencing would turn out for the good of his soul because of their prayers and the resources of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:19)—bringing us back to that insoluble cooperation of God and man in prayer.

In spite of all of her lamentable weaknesses, appalling failures, and indefensible shortcomings, the Church is the mightiest—the only—force that is contesting satan’s rule in human affairs! And that Church on her knees is the purifying and preserving influence which has kept the fabric of all we call civilization from total disintegration, decay, and despair.

Samuel Chadwick said, “The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless works, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray!”

Prayer is not begging God to do something He is loath to do. It is not overcoming God’s reluctance to act. It is, rather, enforcing Christ’s victory over satan. It is the effective, fervent communication with the Creator of the Universe—in line with His will—which affects the balance of power in world affairs.

Prayer transcends the dimensions of time and space and ushers us into the very throne room of God, worshipping, petitioning, and interceding in that spiritual realm of the eternal now.

Prayer is sometimes *alleluia* (Psalm 150). It is sometimes telling God the details of our *needs* (Philippians 4:6). It is sometimes laboring in unutterable groans of *intercession* (Romans 8:26). It is the prayer of a sending church that releases power through His messengers in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas.

Prayer is the arena of spiritual warfare. Those who enter there are in touch with a world in need. Those who enter there regularly know the scars, but also the victory in battle.

I had progressed through the study on spiritual warfare with a group of Bible school students in India. I had a translator who had a good grasp on the English language as well as the material I was covering. The day came for me to teach on “the tactics of the enemy.” I woke up early. I was

so dizzy I could not get out of bed. They called me for breakfast, but I said I would skip it. I struggled to my feet, all the time rebuking the enemy.

I was barely able to get dressed and “ready” for the day. I slowly walked to the auditorium. Once on the platform, to maintain my balance, I had to hold on to the sides of the chair. When I got up to speak, I told them I was so dizzy that I could hardly stand there. I said, “The enemy does not want us to learn about his tactics. You are looking at one of his efforts now! I need you to pray for me.” They did. Oh, how they prayed! And I taught for seven hours that day, without a sign of dizziness. What satan had meant for evil, God turned into a valuable lesson on the effectiveness of prayer.

Prayer is where the action is—supporting and sustaining those on the fields of the world.

Yvonne’s dad was ministering in Africa. He jumped down a small embankment and broke a rib, which punctured his lung. While he was in the hospital, one of his prayer warriors back home was awakened, “knowing” something was wrong. She prayed. Halfway around the world, he was healed instantly. Later, they compared notes to discover her prayer and his healing were at the exact same time.

It is vitally important for your cross-cultural worker to have a strong prayer support team every step of the way: from his calling to his church’s approval, from his Biblical and cultural training to his developing his whole support team—all before he even arrives on the field. And that intercession must continue daily throughout his time on the field. And when he returns home!

All Christians are involved in spiritual warfare. Wherever they are aggressively battling the enemy, there is a greater vulnerability to his attacks. However, your cross-cultural worker often has to deal with battle tactics less familiar than those he faced back home. Where there is less Christian witness, there is greater oppression. Cultures more open to Eastern religions and animism are also more aware of the evil spirit world. Territory that satan has held for generations does not yield easily. Add to this your worker’s adjustment to all the unknowns of his new culture, and you already have a sizable prayer list.

Because you may not have ever “been there,” his prayer needs may seem so remote or unreal. Thus, you may sense a lack of being able to make your prayer specific.

Here is a prayer list to give you a good start in understanding the areas of need peculiar to a cross-cultural worker. When you communicate with him, ask which of these areas are vital to him. As you let him know of your commitment to sustain him in prayer, he will be happy to keep you informed of the more specific requests—especially if you ask in later communication with him how your prayers were answered.

- Adjusting to the new language, different foods, new customs, difficult climate.
- Protection in travel, health, accidents, dangerous situations.
- Parents’ concern for their children’s health, schooling, friendships.
- Housing accommodations, lack of privacy, differences in living standards, lack of accustomed conveniences.
- Loneliness, homesickness, lack of accustomed fellowship with others.
- Interpersonal relationships, dealing with one’s own (and others’) prejudice, selfishness.
- Dependence on the faithfulness of others to meet one’s financial needs.
- Effectiveness in ministry, whatever the assignment.
- Functioning of the tools of ministry. (It is amazing how computers can crash at the wrong time! Yet, is there ever a right time for them to crash?)
- Lack of visible results; the “plowing, planting and watering” stages can go on for years!
- The people being ministered to, the national Christians, the leaders of the country.
- Need for stability, wisdom, compassion, self-discipline, boldness, power, love, to be filled with the Spirit of God.



## A Model Prayer

Jo Shetler had completed the translation of the Balangao New Testament. A flourishing church had been established. Two years later she was called back to the Philippines to be a speaker at the Balangao Bible Conference. Her subject was prayer.

She said that her prayer life had consisted of "... all we ask God to do, such as heal our sicknesses, provide money to put children through school, give the ability to learn a language, translate Scripture, and interact well with people.

"Then I decided to pray the prayers of Paul, David, and others in the Bible. I copied them out and started in. Wow, did I ever get a surprise! Those people weren't asking God for the same things I was! These 'model prayers' from Scripture seemed to center more directly on God and His program, rather than on people and their plans."

Read all the articles on prayer; read all the books about prayer. But when you are done, read, study and use as models the prayers of the Bible!

One of the prayers of Paul fits perfectly the needs of the cross-cultural worker. He was praying the prayer for the Christians in Colossae, but note how adaptable it is to the needs of any missionary.

Even before he prayed, Paul twice assured those at Colossae that he was constantly praying for them. Look at Colossians 1:3 and 9: "praying always for you . . .; for this cause we also, since the day we heard of it, do not cease to pray for you."

Everyone who is interested in your missionary will at one time or another breathe a prayer for him. Certainly the financial support team will pray as they write out their checks: "Lord, may they use this money wisely," or "Lord, do they really need this money more than I do?"

The communication support team will no doubt pray that the missionary will have time to read the email that they wrote and that it will minister to him.

The moral support team will surely whisper a prayer as they see your missionary's picture on the church bulletin board or when the pastor leads in a congregational prayer for him.

But if you are going to be a part of your missionary's prayer support team, your commitment must be more on the level of Paul's statement: "... we also since the day we heard of it, do not cease to pray for you."

Here, then, is a prayer that you can use as a model as you pray for your cross-cultural worker, filling in the details of his specific personality and ministry needs:

***"That you might be filled with the knowledge of His will."***

Colossians 1:9

Once a worker arrives on the field, he is bombarded with an overwhelming array of ministry opportunities. Even if a predetermined job description has been established, there is always one more assignment to fit into the schedule. When joining a team that is short-handed by illness, or workers on home assignment, or lack of laborers for an expanding ministry; your cross-cultural worker may be faced with appeals to take on "just a little bit more."

Out of that mass of good deeds, your worker must discern those that were "beforehand determined that he should walk in" (Ephesians 2: 10).

Once he has heard God's will, a corollary prayer is for him to judiciously share with his supervisor that, in order to maintain his sanity, he must say "no" to certain opportunities.

***"... in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."*** Colossians 1:9

It is noteworthy that throughout Scripture these two qualities of the Christian life are always twins—one with the other. Wisdom can be defined as "the ability to see things from God's perspective" and understanding as "the ability to know how to make that Godly perspective work out in day-to-day living."

One missionary statesman wisely said, "The only ones who know everything about missions are those who have been on the field less than six months!" Bombarded with cultural distinctives, worlds apart from his own culture, and quite possibly faced with methods that have become bogged down in tradition, your worker continually needs to see things from God's perspective—things pertaining to family life, ministry, relationship with

nationals, economy of time and energy, finances, personal devotions, relationships with ministers on his team and those of other groups.

It is not for nothing that Solomon urges: “Get wisdom, and with all your getting, get understanding” (Proverbs 4: 7)!

As your prayers “bind the strong man” (Matthew 12:29) so your worker can have a clear vision from God’s vantage point of eternal values—as your prayers elevate your missionary to realize he is “seated with Christ in heavenly places” (Ephesians 2:6), he must now understand how to make all of that happen in the daily affairs of his life.

Days—even weeks—of extended travel away from home wreak havoc with scheduled family time. Dare we use God’s money to take a vacation? How do I tell the nationals that we aren’t going to use US dollars to build their building—that it is better for the local congregation to trust God for the provision? How do I not violate my doctrinal distinctives, yet develop a working relationship with others in the Body of Christ? These and a thousand questions bombard your worker’s life and demand an understanding heart (1 Kings 3:9). To see things from God’s perspective is one thing (wisdom); to know how to make them work out in your missionary’s everyday life is another (understanding).

You can see how this prayer for wisdom and understanding could consume hours of intercession as you wage war against the enemy, and help your missionary live in the victory Christ won for him on Calvary.

***“That you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.”***

Colossians 1:10

Phillips’ translation puts it, “That your outward lives which men see may bring credit to your Master’s Name.” Watchman Nee said, “If you want to be a missionary to China, plan on wearing a ‘learner’s permit’ around your neck for the first ten years!” Due to diverse cultural distinctives and your cross-cultural worker’s lack of ability to communicate deeply, it is often the love of Christ working through his lifestyle that gives the Gospel message.

Another perspective, of course, is that “What you are doing speaks so loudly, I can’t hear what you are saying!” When your worker’s actions dif-

fer from his words, it will be his actions that the people among whom he ministers will believe.

The enemies of the cross gave the name “Christian” (little Christ) to the believers in Antioch (Acts 11:26). It was a dirty word then, but since the followers of the Way were living epistles, known and read by all men (2 Corinthians 3:2), they were easily identifiable. Are we so easy to identify?

A team of college students walked into a remote village in Central America where there were no Christians. Their job was to paint a school building a previous team had built. They were excited to share the Lord, so the weight of their luggage and equipment seemed light.

As they entered the square, they were met by the village captain. He told them his people had heard all they needed to about “this Man, Jesus” from the last team. “We don’t want to hear another word you might have to say. Just paint our school building as you said you would. We will watch you. When you have finished, we will let you know if we want your Jesus.”

The team knew their outward lives would be living epistles, *“the Word written on fleshly tablets of the heart”* (2 Corinthians 3:2-3). All they believed about the Word was put to the test in that village.

Those students “walked worthy of the Lord”; when they were ready to leave, ten people including the village captain trusted in Christ as their Savior!

***“...being fruitful unto every good work.”*** Colossians 1:10

There are two considerations for prayer here:

- 1) That your missionary will be involved in “good work.” Unfortunately, there are thousands of man-hours of effort that aren’t even aimed at decisive points of battle. Your prayers of intercession will open his eyes to where to spend his energy and that he knows he has the energy and ability to do it. Your prayers will release the Spirit’s guidance in developing a specific strategy “unto every good work” for your missionary.
- 2) Thus, being involved in good works, you and your worker are interested in seeing “fruit that remains.” To birth a child is (to say the least) hard work! Yet, the Word says, “for the joy that a

man is born, the pain is forgotten” (John 16:21). To raise a child in godliness is incomparably more difficult.

To be used of the Spirit to birth a child spiritually and cross-culturally is hard work! To nurture that child to maturity demands the patient endurance of years.

It is true that one sows, another waters, but the Lord gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). The only “good work” for a missionary is not just the salvation of the lost. Pulling a drunken “baby” Christian out of the ditch and have him vomit on your missionary can require your prayers to keep him joyfully serving the Lord.

***“...and increasing in the knowledge of God.”*** Colossians 1:10

The personal devotional life of your worker is at stake here. On the field there are many factors that can lead to spiritual drought:

- 1) Your worker may become so busy “working for the Lord” that there is no time for personal intake. He does not take the time to be still and hear from the Lord. His head can still nod at the appropriate times; his public prayers can still sound holy; his teaching can still be most proper! Unfortunately, though, he knows the life of the Spirit is gone.

Loneliness haunts many cross-cultural workers. More susceptible, of course, are single adults. This can lead to seeking inappropriate relationships, which can lead to spiritual dryness.

- 2) One single woman was continually being harassed by the married people about “getting married.” Unfortunately she found relief from this pressure in a local bar! A kind married couple became her confidants.
- 3) Expectations of the people back home are not met. Some think, “We are paying the bill. We want to see some results!” And generally those “results” are in the number of conversions.

One friend wrote from a very difficult field. He knew that his major work would be “breaking up fallow ground” and had communicated that to his support team members. But, after six

months the people back home were wanting “statistics”! He had none. He was discouraged.

- 4) Failure in task takes its toll on some. Discouragement debilitates. This downward spiral of morale is slippery. At the bottom of the slide are many spiritually depleted field workers. Often these burned-out workers do not realize they should go home. They become an embarrassment to the mission endeavor, a drain on the energies of others who are trying to help them and a dismal blot on the testimony of God’s Church in the world!
- 5) Disillusionment can bring awful frustration, which in turn may lead to spiritual drought. In the mission process there are many tasks that aren’t very glamorous—cleaning the grease trap outside the kitchen door, keeping inventory on radio parts, or being reviled by a drunken street-sleeper.
- 6) One may become discontented with other workers. “Discontent” is putting it mildly! “Radical interpersonal relationship problems” might be more accurate. This is the number one cause of missionary failure. Why? Because Jesus said, “They [the ones your worker has gone out to seek and to save] will know we are His disciples by our love for one another” (John 13:35). So here is a major area of attack by the enemy: If he can destroy our unity he will destroy our testimony!

Your prayers and the united intercession of the prayer support team for your cross-cultural worker will put a hedge of protection around him (Ezekiel 22:30), will guard his thoughts (Philippians 4:4-7), and will give him the wisdom of a peacemaker in those tough interpersonal situations (James 3:13-18).

***“...strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power.”***

Colossians 1:11

In Acts 1:4 and 8 Jesus gave clear instruction to His disciples to wait for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon them. It’s a jungle out there! It is insane to step into cross-cultural outreach ministry without “His glorious power.” It is imperative to have a vital, personal, alive, active,

growing, dynamic, real relationship with the third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit.

My wife leads teams on prayer walks in spiritually dark places. The atmosphere is oppressive. The powers of darkness are permeating the very air they breathe. They find it of value to pray as Paul did: “I will pray in the spirit and with understanding” (I Corinthians 14:15).

Intercede for your cross-cultural worker that he would be continually being “filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). Pray that he will daily “mind the things of the Spirit” (Romans 8). Life and ministry in a second culture (actually, we all walk in an alien world!) hold challenges foreign to your worker but not to the Spirit of God. As you pray, the Spirit of truth will guide him into all truth (John 16:13).

***“...unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.”***

Colossians 1:11

Yvonne and I, and three of our children, were ready to leave Brazil. Because we had stayed several months over the two-year visa issued, the federal government in Brasilia had provided us with a letter assuring us that all was in order for us to leave. However, at the time of departure, we had to present that letter and our passports (which did show an expired visa) to the state official. He looked at me and said, “You are in our country illegally! That will be a \$500 fine!” We spent three days returning to that official trying to convince him (speaking through a translator, of course) to let us go. Finally, finding a way to let him “save face”, he came up with an idea and he stamped our exit visa.

Missionaries are more than familiar with bank lines, gas lines, food lines, and delays in mail deliveries, material deliveries, and baby deliveries! Patience and longsuffering are critical!

But there is another phrase: “with joyfulness.” Yes, your worker might in stoicism realize he has no alternative than to wait. The issue is, can he brush off the cobwebs of delay with joyfulness? Can the joy of the Lord be his strength as after a two-hour wait in line he steps up to the bank teller’s window and is told, “Sorry, we are going on strike right now!”

One day another friend went to his bank. He saw that they were going to do some construction. He thought—this is great. They are going to put

in another teller window. However, on his next visit, they had enlarged the waiting area!

Yes, your prayers as vials of sweet incense intercede for him before the Father day and night, meting out to him the measure of grace sufficient for any trial. Prayer is where the action is!

**“...*Giving thanks unto the Father.*”** Colossians 1:12

Paul enjoined the Christians in Philippi to “Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6). A thankful attitude reveals a heart that is right with God. Every time you enter your arena of prayer for your friend, enter “His gates with thanksgiving in your heart and enter His courts with praise” (Psalm 100:4).

The pressures of the mission field can produce in your worker something other than a thankful attitude. The difficult living conditions can say, “It’s not fair!” The depleting of finances each month can shout, “I deserve better!” The lack of apparent spiritual response can cry, “These people are not worth my time!” The breakdown in health can mull over, “I guess God didn’t really call me to this work!”

Your prayers can be used to challenge your missionary with Mordecai’s words: “Who knows but that for such an hour as this you have been called to the Kingdom?” (Esther 4: 14) Your prayers can be used to help your cross-cultural worker identify with Paul: “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8: 18). Your prayers can be used to stir the resources that will build in your field worker an attitude of thankfulness: “It is a privilege to be about our Father’s business.”

## **In-The-Gap Praying**

*“And I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.”* Ezekiel 22:30

The “gap” mentioned in Ezekiel has been used to express a number of concepts. Prophetically Jesus came to bridge the chasm between God and



man. As an appeal to people to go the mission fields of the world, filling in the “gap” of front-line workers is critical. There are cultural gaps between the missionary and the people group he is trying to reach.

In the context of Ezekiel, though, “in the gap” speaks more directly of the role of an intercessor—one who forms a barrier (a hedge) between God (who is speaking) and “the land, that I should not destroy it.”

*“I looked for a man....”* Abraham became that man: “God, will you not spare the city for fifty righteous men? Forty-five? Forty? Thirty? Twenty? Ten? Far be it from You to slay the righteous with the wicked.... Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18). Those are powerful words for one who had “taken upon himself to speak to the Lord, seeing [he was] but dust and ashes!” He stood in the gap.

*“I looked for a man....”* Moses became that man: “And Moses besought the face of the Lord his God, and said, ‘Lord, why does Your wrath wax hot against *Your* people? Just four verses earlier, in His anger God had called them Moses’ people! After two more verses of intercession, “the Lord repented of the evil which He thought to do unto His people” (Exodus 32:11-14).

Another time Moses even more boldly said: “Yet now, if you will forgive their sin...; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Your book which You have written” (Exodus 32:32)! Read Deuteronomy, Chapter Nine for a review of the many times Moses stood in the gap for his people. Moses was definitely an “in-the-gap” intercessor!

*“I looked for a man....”* Aaron became that man (Numbers 16). Nehemiah became that man (Nehemiah). Jesus became that Man (John 17). Paul became that man (Romans 9). Others through the generations of time have become that man, that woman who stood in the gap.

And today Scripture still declares the voice of God—which perhaps is saying to you, “I am looking for you to make up the hedge, to stand in the gap!”

A battle is raging for the souls of mankind. In the book of Job, we have been given some insight into the spiritual realm from which this war emanates.

Job had arrived! He was rich. He was famous. He was perfect and upright. He feared God and hated evil. At least, this is what the human eye could see.

Behind the scenes of this visible world, however, is the real world. And satan saw the hedge complete—not only around Job, but “about his house, and about all that he has on every side” (Job 1:1-10). Two excellent novels, *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness* by Frank Peretti, give thought-provoking possibilities to the subtleties of this behind-the-scenes war.

The “accuser of the brethren” (Revelation 12:10) is “going to and fro in the earth, and is walking up and down in it seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). When he sees the breach in the hedge, the broken-down walls, the secret thoughts of sin, he is able to enter the minds and hearts of men with ease.

Even when that hedge is complete around a man, satan presents himself before God. It’s those “perfect ones” he wants to get. So God, knowing his thoughts, says, “satan, have you set your heart on my servant, Job?” (Job 1:8).

This is one of the works of the enemy: To set his heart on even the elect, if it were possible (Matthew 24:24). Jesus said, “Peter, satan desires to have you to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you” (Luke 22:31). Satan and a third of the host of heaven who rebelled against God with him are out to destroy, to whatever degree and with whatever diabolical consequences they can contrive.

Picture the scene in that heavenly throne room, that secret place you enter boldly to obtain mercy and grace to help in your time of need (Hebrews 4:16). Not only are you in God’s presence as you intercede for the “mercy and grace” your cross-cultural worker needs, but also present is the adversary. Whether the enemy of our souls is telling the truth about our weaknesses or lying about us, he is using any tactic in his fiendish arsenal to break through the hedge and rush through the gap. This is not only for your friend, but for you and the prayer support team, as well. If he can destroy the prayer warriors, he has destroyed the front line of defense.

Unbelief is the single most serious factor that breaks down the hedge. God is looking for a team, for a woman, for a man “to make up the hedge, to stand in the gap before Me for the land (on behalf of the people), that I should not destroy it: but I found none!” And, in the Ezekiel account, it can be assumed that destruction came!

May it not be said of us on that awesome judgment day that He was calling from among us—a prayer support team to stand in the gap—but He found none! Rather may He say, “Well done thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of the Lord!” (Matthew 25:21)

One of the strongest weapons to bind the work of the enemy is the intercessory, effectual, fervent prayer of a committed united team of believers (James 5: 16).

The prayer support team should never be limited in number nor can we be certain whose prayer and when that prayer will be effective.

One morning while trying to watch my son’s surgery, I “decided” to faint! In the process, I sustained a fractured skull and serious brain concussion. For three weeks I lay flat in bed and lived from one pain pill to the next. I was praying! My wife was praying! Our children were praying! Plus, all the missionaries in the area were praying! Without my knowledge one morning my wife got on the ham radio to solicit additional prayer from the team back home. She contacted our pastors wife just as she was preparing to go to a church prayer meeting. Following that prayer of intercession, I never took another pain pill. I had no more pain. Why our prayers, over that period of three weeks, “didn’t work”, I’ll never know. But I certainly rejoice that somebody’s prayer (maybe it was the prayers of all of us, combined!) was submitted to the will of the Father, and healing came.

## **Fasting And Prayer**

In a trilogy of instruction in what has become known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “When you give..., when you pray..., when you fast.” He presumes that we will fast. He follows each injunction with contrasting instruction: “Don’t do it this way; but do do it this way” (Matthew 6:1-18).

Unfortunately, today what most Christians know about fasting and food is *fast food*! The Biblical significance of fasting, however, is so profound throughout the Old and New Testaments that for us to be ignorant of or indifferent toward its place in a Christian’s life is equal to “spiritual starvation!”

“But I’ll starve to death!” is exactly the way many Christians respond. Therefore, we need to know the “what, why, when, and how” of fasting.

*What is fasting?* Both in the secular sense and in the Biblical sense, fasting means abstaining from food. It is more than just to stop eating, however. A total fast is abstaining from all food and drink (Exodus 34:28). A normal fast allows the intake of drink (Luke 4:2). A limited fast indicates restriction of certain types of foods (Daniel 10:2-3). Prayer and care must be taken in choosing the type of fast that God wants us to enter.

*Why should we fast?* Because Jesus told us to. Isaiah gave clear spiritual and physical purposes for the exercise of fasting:

a) Spiritual: “To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke.”

b) Physical: “To deal your bread to the hungry, to bring the poor that are afflicted to your home, to clothe the naked, and to be available to help your own relatives” (Isaiah 58:6-7).

*When should we fast?* Definitely not when Christ the Bridegroom is around. “But when He is taken up from among them, then they will fast” (Matthew 9:14-15). As we still await the return of the Bridegroom, now is the time for fasting!

*How should we fast?* Definitely “not as the hypocrite who puts on a gloomy face and neglects his appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Rather, brush your hair and wash your face so that nobody knows that you are fasting. Let it be a secret between you and your Father. For He knows all secrets and will reward you” (Matthew 6:17-18).

Because our bodies are meant to take in food, and there is no spiritual merit in injuring our bodies through fasting, there are other important “do’s and don’ts” we must consider as we enter and conclude our fast. One of the finest works on the subject of fasting is Arthur Wallis’ classic, *God’s Chosen Fast*.

When prayer and fasting are practiced in concert, they present a unique and powerful duo. Incorporate the practice of fasting with your prayer for your missionary.

What a privilege that God allows us to participate in His Plan of the Ages by coming boldly before Him, interceding on behalf of the lost of the world as well as for the workers who have gone out to the fields of the

world. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31) What an unequal contest it seems!

It is prayer that links the missionary enterprise to the irresistible power of God. Prayer is the decisive point on which the battle turns. The mightiest weapon we can use is the weapon of prayer—potent, powerful, prevailing prayer, the prayer of faith against which the adversary has no effective counter weapon.

Yvonne and I are aware of the intensity of true prayer warfare. With this in mind, each year we personally release our prayer team from their commitment. Of course, we also encourage them to “re-up” for another year of intercession. Having them make an annual commitment keeps the seriousness of prayer clear in their minds.

Unfortunately, through the years we have lost some valuable prayer warriors. We cannot over-emphasize the importance of praying with someone and praying for your own protection in this most vital area of care.

One of our faithful prayer warriors called my wife. She said that she could no longer pray for us when we traveled. She explained that on each trip when she would commit to pray, her daughter would get sick with asthma, even requiring hospitalization! Yvonne asked her if she first prayed for protection for herself and her family before interceding for us. She admitted that she hadn’t and agreed to pray for the next trip. She prayed for her family’s protection before entering into intercession for us. Her daughter has not experienced the same problem again.

*“Pray without ceasing”* (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

## **It Happened This Way In Sacramento**

Prayer support for our missionaries is much harder to talk about than the other areas of care. For example, in regards to financial support, we have the concrete evidence every month when the checks come into the church office that the people are following through with their commitment.

Prayer support is a little more difficult. There is not that tangible “something” to assure us that they are following through with their commitment. Nor is it easy in our busy lifestyle to commit the time to pray for missionaries. It takes only minutes to write a check. Or, today, only

a one-time “commitment” to tell the bank to send a check every month! Prayer, however, takes time! So, in this area, we need to work harder.

One element of prayer support is an awareness of needs. You need a good system for making needs known. You can do this in several ways:

- 1) Everyone committed to support our missionaries in prayer is encouraged to have one clock in their house set to the time of their ministry location. When we wake up at 7A.M. and realize what time it is for them, it can prompt us to pray with an increased awareness of what they are doing at that time. It might even be a different day there!
- 2) Our missionaries have a monthly newsletter they send to supporters with a specific section summarizing their prayer needs. This portion of the letter can be printed out, highlighted and stuck to the refrigerator with a photo magnet that they received when they made the commitment to pray.
- 3) Two prayer chains have been formed. A prayer chain is simply a list of names and phone numbers. As a prayer request is made known via phone call or email, the person at the top of the list is notified. He phones the next person on the list who then relays the message to the next person and so on until all are made aware of the need.

Two prayer chains were developed for this reason: It was felt that there may be times when a need would arise that was of such a personal nature that it might be best if only the Core Group and a few others determined by our missionaries would know about it in detail. The second prayer chain would receive that prayer request in more general terms. Other requests may be given to both groups.

Another element of prayer support is to be able to intercede as led by the Holy Spirit without even knowing the needs. Or perhaps, the information we receive indicating their needs aren't really the needs at all! It is necessary for us then, by the Spirit to perceive the real needs as we get together in intercession for them and the people among whom they're ministering. We're always trying to expand our prayer so we include the people group. Our missionaries will be coming home one day, and it seems only

reasonable we would develop hearts for the needs of those people now so we can keep praying for God's activity among them for years to come.

One way we are attempting to increase the effectiveness of our prayers was expressed in a recent email we sent out to all our prayer supporters. In it we asked for volunteers to make a weekly commitment to fast and pray for one hour. We suggested a dinner fast (actually starting right after lunch) with a prayer time following in the evening. We also stated that if they felt led to commit to a longer fast or even a partial fast—that was certainly between them and the Lord.

Prayer is truly a powerful weapon to be used in the spiritual conflicts encountered in cross-cultural ministry. Yet again, there are other aspects of your worker's life that must be considered. He, as a cultural being, will want you to keep in touch with him through communication support.

## For Your Personal Involvement

- Keep a record for one week of the prayers you pray. Is there a good mixture of praise, personal petition, intercession and thanksgiving?
- Study the prayers of several Bible characters. (Be sure to include the publican's prayer in Luke 18:13!) Or read through all the prayers of one person. Identify if each is a prayer of thanksgiving, praise, personal petition or intercession. Become familiar with the way the prayer sounds. Compare (or contrast) them with your style of praying.
- Locate, read, and study the nineteen recorded prayers of Jesus.
- Begin or become part of a missions prayer group where you can learn to participate in the power of united prayer.
- Read Arthur Wallis' book, *God's Chosen Fast*.

## Action Steps

By the time you have read this chapter, completed the *For Your Personal Involvement* section and participated in a discussion group, you should . . .

- More and more, use the prayers of the Bible as models for your prayers. Avoid as much as possible the ever-popular "gimmie" prayers.
- Be able to decide if prayer support is a commitment you can make to your missionary. If you can, contact him, letting him know of that commitment and of your desire to be kept informed of his prayer needs.
- Practice the Christian discipline of fasting.
- Pray without ceasing!
- Multiply yourself. Actively look for others in your circle of relationships who have or who might develop a heart for prayer.