

# Chapter Twelve

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## PRAYER AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS

What is the role of prayer in church planting movements that will eventually result in a disciplined nation?

Church planting is born from a vision, given by the Holy Spirit, of God's love for lost people. The vision compels the church planter to move on until all peoples have had the opportunity to respond to the invitation of Jesus Christ.

Vision in scripture is always a revelation from God, rather than a human construct of what needs to be done. Vision from God is an action to be obeyed, as in directing Peter to go to Cornelius, or Paul, following his Damascus Road experience, being sent to the Gentiles, and later to Macedonia.

“Growing churches who are reaching out in faithful mission and ministry are characterised by leaders who have a vision from God. The vision usually comes as a result of prayer, fasting and reading the Word.”<sup>1</sup> That vision becomes contagious, motivating not only the church planter, but also those working closely with him, and its authenticity inspires a costly obedience and sacrifice – usually so big only God can accomplish it!

A church planting vision encompasses both strategy and empowerment. Wolfgang Simson says,

“Strategy is how we use our limited resources towards a specific goal in the most economic and efficient manner. Strategy focuses energy.” But “we then need to find and release God's prayer leaders to initiate and develop prayer momentum, start a process of research and prayerful analysis to get our facts right. As we pray...God may then speak to us about the specific way forward...usually alerting the prophets amongst us first (Am. 3:7-8), uniting the church through spiritual vision, combining the five-fold ministries in strategic synergy, prompting us to see in His word revelations which we overlooked for far too long, awakening more and more people in the night to intercede, giving dreams

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<sup>1</sup> David W. Shenk and Ervin R. Stutzman, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom: New Testament Models of Church Planting*, Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988, 65.

and visions, and ultimately pour out His Holy Spirit on all flesh to shake us all awake to the redemptive purposes of our time.”<sup>2</sup>

The early church was born in a prayer meeting. One hundred and twenty of the disciples waited ten days in the Upper Room, “all joined together constantly in prayer” (Acts 1:14) in anticipation of the promised Holy Spirit, who would anoint and empower them, resulting in thousands of converts, and unnumbered house churches being established. They prayed for boldness to speak the gospel, and for accompanying signs and wonders, and after they prayed “the place where they were meeting was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:29-31). The church crossed the cultural barriers of Judaism, spreading first to the Samaritans and then on to the Gentiles throughout Asia Minor and on into Europe. The church has been expanding ever since through the power and leading of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. J. Edwin Orr of Fuller Theological Seminary has done extensive research into the great spiritual awakenings of the past, and has found that every great revival has followed a time of repentance and prayer among Christians. It seems that God releases His Holy Spirit in power and evangelism when Christians truly humble themselves in prayer.<sup>3</sup>

Brian Mills, DAWN prayer co-ordinator for England, affirms that wherever there is openness to the gospel, faithful prayer has gone before. Prayer intensifies the activity of God’s love and power. He likens evangelism without prayer to an explosive without a detonator, and prayer without evangelism to a detonator without an explosive. Put the two together and the gates of hell cannot stand!

When a church leader in Borneo was asked why God was so evidently at work in his country he replied “We’ve learned how to clear the ‘spiritual airwaves.’ A key feature was sacrificial prayer *before* evangelism had even been attempted. One training college did little but pray for six months, before going out to evangelise and church plant. Daily pre-dawn prayer meetings, all day prayer and fasting, and nights of prayer are some examples of sacrificial prayer.”<sup>4</sup>

Today every region of the world is experiencing some kind of Church Planting Movement.<sup>5</sup> In the last 15 years, between 750 thousand and 1 million new churches have been started in nations where saturation church planting movement are underway, resulting in millions of believers coming into the Kingdom.

The International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention has tried to document the Church Planting Movements their missionaries have been involved with. World by Radio, the multi-media track of the AD 2000 movement has established an International Research Office to track Church Planting Movements spontaneously

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<sup>2</sup> Wolfgang Simson, “*Houses That Change the World*,” unpublished manuscript, Madras, 1998, 140-141.

<sup>3</sup> Shenk and Stutzman, 38.

<sup>4</sup> Brian Mills, *Developing a Prayer Strategy*, available from DAWN Ministries, 5775 N. Union Blvd. Colorado Springs, CO, 1994, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Garrison, 4.

spawned via radio, and the AD 2000 Prayer Track reported the greatest forward thrust ever recorded in world evangelisation since the initiation of co-ordinated world-wide prayer for unreached people groups, spawned by the Lausanne Movement in 1989.

Much can be learned from what God has been doing around the world. The following case studies illustrate the ways in which He is moving among various people groups.

### **Cambodia (1990s)**

Between the chaos of the Vietnam war, and the genocide of Cambodians by Pol Pot, Cambodia's infra-structure and social fabric was left in ruins. By 1990, Cambodia's evangelical population had shrunk to only 600 believers. Amazingly, the church grew from 6 churches to 200, 600 believers to 60,000 in one decade, 1990-1999.

Shortly after the Southern Baptist International Mission Board (IMB) placed their missionary in Cambodia, 30 other agencies entered the country. However, the IMB has had by far the greatest success in church planting. In trying to identify the key factors in this, the missionary cited the following:

- Prayer: "Over the past six years there has been more mobilised prayer for the people of Cambodia than any other time in their history " (Church Planting Movements, 29) He credits prayer with protecting church planters and opening Khmer hearts to gospel.
- Training laymen for church planting: doctrine, evangelism and church planting (house church development) via a Theological Education by Extension model, in areas targeted by church planters. Training involved 16 weeks spread over 2 years, so the trainee could continue involvement in the church plant as well as his livelihood.
- Mentoring, and modelling skills, values, and principles transferred to trainees (2 Tim2: 2).
- The vision for reaching the entire country with a Church Planting Movement came from local leaders – taught and caught in local church – church planters were local church members rather than missionaries or professional church planters. Missionaries were in a catalytic role rather than prominent leadership.

From the outset the 'torch' was in Cambodian hands – every church planted by Cambodians.<sup>6</sup>

### **China**

In the early 1990s China was in crisis – social upheaval, rapid urbanisation, new ideas (old Maoist doctrines on the way out), the student democracy movement violently suppressed, people were looking for hope for a better future.

The IMB assigned a strategist to research the Han Chinese people group. He found three local house churches made up of about 85 believers. He recruited Chinese Christian co-

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 26-31.

labourers, partnered them with small teams of local believers with the goal of planting churches. From 1993 to 1998, the church grew to 550 churches with 55,000 believers. Key factors identified were:

- The movement was bathed in prayer by the missionary and all believers who followed
- Training and structure: he trained a small core of believers in lay-led participatory bible study and cell or house church planting methods.
- “Response filtering” – large scale evangelism events (video, radio or other mass outreach tools) were followed up with gathering those interested in further contact into bible studies with the goal of becoming a house church.
- He instilled a vision for reaching the entire province with the gospel
- The model of church planting he taught was: 1) Model, 2) Assist, 3) Watch, 4) Leave
- Leadership training was done through one-on-one mentoring (no seminary or bible school) – each disciple at the same time was a discipler. New converts were immediately taught to evangelise and church plant.

Persecution and death accompanied the spread of the gospel, but there was no systematic government effort to stop the movement. There was also no denominational affiliation, which made them less vulnerable to government interference. The missionary left soon after the movement started thereby avoiding government attention.<sup>7</sup>

Another realm in which Church Planting Movements are developing is in conjunction with radio broadcasting. Radio broadcasters’ first priority is usually not church planting. However, God has been doing a unique thing through radio in recent years.

### **Mozambique**

This nation, ravaged by civil war for many years, resulted in more than a million displaced citizens. Drought, food shortages and raging floods added to the misery of its people. Yet God, demonstrating His love for this nation, without a consistent evangelical witness, has brought thousands to Christ!

Words of Hope has been broadcasting into two remote unreached people groups since 1989 - the Lomwe, numbering 1.4 million people, and the Makhuwa, considered the largest animistic unreached group in Africa. More than 300 new churches have spontaneously emerged among groups of listeners. With high unemployment, and few radios, people from several households gather around a single radio, listening to the only broadcast of any kind in their native tongue, and find Christ. They are not only forming house churches around the radio, they are also moving out to neighbouring villages to share the gospel.<sup>8</sup>

### **India**

India represents what may be the most amazing church planting story of all. In a nation where almost 82% are Hindu and 12% Muslim, Trans World Radio was receiving about

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 16-21.

<sup>8</sup> Personal interview with Lee DeYoung, vice president of broadcasting for Words of Hope. Also documented in “Words of Hope,” *Mission Frontiers*, Dec.2000, 12.

15,000 letters a month from listeners wanting to know more about Jesus. With only 2.6 % of the 1 billion people of India Christian, it is hard to find a church to refer people to for follow-up. Seeking to meet the needs of these seekers, TWR-India organised a church-planting mission that could conduct seekers' meetings, form Bible studies at the request of those seekers, which then turn into house churches. As the house churches multiplied, it became clear that pastors were needed to care for and disciple people long term, so the India Believer's Fellowship was established as the pastoral wing of the church planting movement.

The entire ministry of sending, supporting, and sustaining is carried out and underwritten by Indian Christians. Growth is of Holy Spirit magnitude. From eight languages broadcast five hours a day in 1977, with 15,000 letters monthly, the ministry has grown to 45 languages broadcast 14 hours a day with 75,000 monthly letters. There are 710 mission workers in 272 'mission fields.' Since its founding in 1994, IBF now has 406 congregations, each with 100 baptised members; all are radio converts with no transfer growth. Increasing government pressure on Christians, leaders feel, will only cause the church to grow more rapidly, because "radio waves face no barrier!"<sup>9</sup>

Similar stories are emerging from among the Mhong people of Vietnam, the Romani (Gypsies) of Europe, and from China.

### **What do all of these Church Planting Movements have in common?**

Prayer! Prayer has been fundamental to every Church Planting Movement. Initially the vitality of the missionary's personal prayer life (following the example of "Praying Hyde," missionary to India) leads to its imitation in the lives of new church leaders. The missionary thus reveals the source of power in prayer, the indigenous leaders's greatest resource. "This sharing of the power source is critical to the transfer of vision and momentum from the missionary to the new local Christian leadership."<sup>10</sup>

There has also been an outpouring of prayer in the last decade on a scale unknown before in history, based on sheer numbers. Prayer followed by revival has characterised the church for the last 2000 years, as documented in the book of Acts, so what is happening these days is not new in kind, just in magnitude.

A global prayer movement was birthed in the aftermath of the launching of the AD 2000 Movement, as a central part of the organisation's goal to work towards the completion of the Great Commission. Estimates are that up to 40 million Christians have been praying for unreached people groups in the 10/40 Window alternate years, from 1993 to the present. In addition, a call to Christians to 'pray through Ramadan' with a special focus on the Muslim world was begun in 1992, and has been an annual event since then, with an estimated 20 million believers joining together in prayer. Prayer journeys to resistant countries, prayerwalking, and establishing cells or 'lighthouses of prayer' throughout neighbourhoods targeted for evangelism, spiritual mapping to determine roots of resistance in a region or city, and prayers for reconciliation have all been means for

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<sup>9</sup> Richard S. Greene, "Words of Hope," *Mission Frontiers*, Dec.2000, 12-13.

<sup>10</sup> Garrison, 33.

focused, passionate prayer to see the lost come to Christ. It hardly seems coincidental that most of the Church Planting Movements being tracked today have sprung up in the last decade.

For example, Every Home for Christ noted that responses to their gospel presentations in India increased from 1% to 10% in the months immediately following the first global prayer thrust in 1993. The formation of house churches by EHC's ministry in India jumped to 150 per month.<sup>11</sup> TWR-India's church planting efforts have been established during these same years, as well as the Southern Baptist efforts among the Bholdari of India, where they report, "in 1992 the tide turned." A few years ago, leaders in India challenged DAWN leaders to build a network of 50,000 people who would intercede continuously on behalf of their growing army of church planters, who were facing growing hostility and persecution. Roy Wingerd, director for India, took the challenge seriously, and began to build a network not only for India, but also for church planting around the world. Today there are 100,000 people praying strategically for India, and the goal is now to enlist 1,000,000 intercessors (500,000 from Latin America and 500,000 from the rest of the world).<sup>12</sup>

Peter Wagner, leader of the former AD 2000 United Prayer Track, notes that "while we were praying, the greatest forward thrust ever recorded in world evangelisation was taking place before our eyes. Of the targeted unreached people groups, 78% now have reported evangelism/church-planting activities on site. (Prior to this prayer effort) only 4% of the people groups had a church of 100 or more, but now the figure is 33%."<sup>13</sup>

While prayer strategies differ from one organisation to another, as well as from one missionary to another, there are common threads that seem to be a part of the move of God's Spirit. First is the preparation of the heart of the church planter or missionary. Those whose stories have been told all seem to have entered a significant time of personal preparation through prayer. Strategies for launching church planting were discovered in prayer, leadership chosen through prayer, and unity among leaders maintained through prayer.

When cities are targeted for an evangelistic thrust, unity among the church or mission leadership is essential, and that unity is created by the Holy Spirit as leaders humble themselves before each other, repent of pride and competition, and join together to see God's Kingdom advance. "Unity is not power, but purpose powered by unity is unstoppable."<sup>14</sup>

United prolonged prayer for a city, region or people group can reveal the key to Gospel receptivity in a community as well as an individual. Tools such as spiritual mapping or

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<sup>11</sup> Jacqueline Dugas, "The Priority and Power of Prayer," *Transforming Our Nation*, Ed. Murray Moerman, Richmond, BC: Church Leadership Library, 1998, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Jim Montgomery and Steve Steele, *Introducing the DAWN Strategy for Completion of the Great Commission*, Colorado Springs, CO: DAWN Ministries, 2000, 15.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Wagner, "Looking Back to Surge Ahead," *Global Prayer News*, July-Sept., 2000:1, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Siaki, "Unity through the Lens of Scripture," *The Church Leader in Africa*, 10.4 (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 2000),

ethnography empowered by insights from the Holy Spirit can enhance the effectiveness of those trying to penetrate that people group. George Otis, Jr. describes spiritual mapping as “a means whereby we can see what is beneath the surface of the material world; but it is not magic. It is subjective in that it is a skill born out of a right relationship with God and a love for His world. It is objective in that it can be verified (or discredited) by history, sociological observation and God’s Word.”<sup>15</sup> Intercessors need to both listen to the Holy Spirit and attune their eyes and ears to the people they are wanting to reach, in order to understand both the spiritual as well as the human forces arrayed against them, and overcome them through prayer.

Ultimately God will fulfil His purpose: the gathering of that “great multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb... And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.... Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God forever. Amen!’” (Rev. 7:9-12).

“As Christians in many ways and many lands obey (the Great Commission), God will create the hundreds of millions of new creatures needed to enable the nations everywhere to solve their problems and to be the blessing to the world He intends them to be,”<sup>16</sup> until that final day!

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<sup>15</sup> Dugas, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Donald A. McGavran, *Ethnic Realities and the Church*, Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979, 242.

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