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## The Role of Prayer in Ministries Dependent upon Donations

He had just made a social *faux pas* that could mean the end of his vision and even his life. He became dreadfully afraid. Months of fasting and praying had preceded this day. How could God let it end this way? Quickly he reassured the donor of his non-threatening intentions and then he prayed. What happened next was an outlining of a detailed plan for the restoration of Jerusalem. In the end, the donor-king granted Nehemiah's request, but Nehemiah realized that the king's benevolence was "according to the good hand of my God upon me" (Neh 2:8).

The first two chapters of Nehemiah are crammed full of inspiration for a ministry dependent upon donations. However, the two most important concepts are that God is the source of everything and that prayer is necessary in aligning a ministry with God's goals. Nehemiah was shaken when he received reports of his people back in Judah. He "sat down and wept, and mourned for many days" (Neh 1:4 NKJV). He then poured his heart out to God in a prayer that contained the elements of praise, confession of his people's sins, claiming the promise of God's faithfulness, and a request. The request was to find mercy in the sight of the King. Four months passed before the opportunity came.

Being the king's cupbearer carried heavy responsibilities. Making sure that the king's drink was not poisoned also allowed Nehemiah access to the king. So when Nehemiah, for the first time ever, appeared sad before the king, Artaxerxes called out his strange behavior. Immediately, Nehemiah realized the seriousness of the situation and became "dreadfully afraid." The words came out of his mouth, "May the King live forever!" He then went on to explain his sorrow of heart. "What do you request?" the king asked. Then Nehemiah prayed.

Nehemiah knew that God would need to grant him mercy in the king's eyes if the king was to grant his request. Carefully, Nehemiah listed the concise details of his carefully crafted plan which included a time line,

goals, and provisions to rebuild Jerusalem, his own personal needs, and permission to travel. When the king granted his request, Nehemiah gave God the glory. God used Nehemiah to rebuild the walls by creating a desire in him to accomplish that task, by giving him a plan, and by granting him mercy in the eyes of the donor-king. And prayer was the key that unlocked this calling for Nehemiah.

Ellen White tells us that “prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven’s storehouse where are treasured the boundless resources of omnipotence” (1892:94, 95). Boundless resources indeed! “The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps 24:1). The land, the silver, the gold are all God’s (Lev 25:23, Hag 2:8). God is the source for everything that a ministry needs.

A word to describe when a person has learned the lesson that God is the source of everything is “dependence.” The founder of Adventist Frontier Missions (AFM), Clyde Morgan, related several experiences in which God taught him the lessons of dependence on God. These lessons were communicated through the avenue of prayer. Early on the Morgan family was dependent on a donor to send supplemental income to where they were working in Saipan. Usually the monthly assistance came on time. Sometimes it would be delayed for a couple of weeks, but occasionally by a month! Without sufficient funds, Clyde wrestled over the idea of writing a letter to the donor (without mentioning the money) as an attempt to jog their memory. But each time after seeking the Lord’s will in prayer, Clyde distinctly heard God say, “No, I don’t want you to do that.” During this time of waiting, Matt 6:25-34 became very dear to Clyde as he learned to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt 6:33). On one occasion God said, “If you need more money, I can take care of that. But if you need less, I can do that too.” This was the first real testing ground for building Clyde’s faith, but it was not the last.

Another growing time came as Clyde and Cathy were finishing seminary and debating whether or not to work for AFM full-time. Various people were counseling different things: go back into pastoral ministry and grow AFM on the side, or get a part-time job to support your family and work to build AFM, but Clyde heard God distinctly say, “I want you fulltime from the start.” With a December graduation looming close, Clyde was concerned that AFM was only getting very small donations, and only had \$30 to \$40 cash on hand. There was no way to support a family on that amount of money. After graduation Clyde took many walks, praying for clarity and direction. He remembers devoting his life to reaching the unreached but struggling with the money aspect. Over and over he had the impression that God wanted him fulltime in the ministry from the

beginning, but how? Finally, Clyde and Cathy asked for a sign. "Lord, give us the first month's rent for our home and we'll take that as a sign to go forward." Later that day, Clyde called back to Berrien Springs. The person receiving the mail for AFM reported that \$275 had come in! Shortly after, another \$350 arrived. This was so unusual, that they knew these donations were an act of God, a direct answer to prayer. Five days later they received a \$1,000 gift, and AFM's dependence on God for funding was in full swing.

AFM's first missionaries, Marc and Aunie Scalzi, had a miraculous funding story. One morning Clyde got an early morning call from the west coast. At 4:30 a.m., a donor called to say that she couldn't sleep all night because God wanted her to support the Scalzis so they could go!

This story is characteristic of God's dealing with AFM missionaries in the form of answered prayer where they clearly see the hand of God moving on someone to support them. These acts of God confirm his call for them to go as cross-cultural missionaries to reach the unreached.

One missionary, John Baxter, relates this story of not only being the one helped, but also of being a part of God's confirmation for another couple.

Prior to training we received \$500 towards launching our project. Beth and I were thrilled with this generosity, especially since the donors would soon be going to the mission field. While at training another family joined us, but they had not made the decision to go as missionaries or not. On the last day of training, they affirmed that they would go and serve on the frontiers.

Their decision to go, and the generosity of the other missionary family towards Beth and me caused me to think. I would like to give this newly decided family \$500 of our personal money as a means of encouraging them. Now \$500 represented a significant amount of our savings and rather than ask my wife directly, I prayed for God to ask my wife to have us give them the money. The next morning the first thing that Beth said to me was not, "Good morning," or "I love you," but rather "You know, the family who went through training with us and just decided to become missionaries, I think we should give them \$500." I was stunned and thrilled to see God confirm that we should do this for our friends.

I set off to tell them what God had done. Before I got a chance to share this news with them, the father of the family who had given the donation to our launching goal informed me that their family had been praying and they wanted to give us another \$1,000! I was flabbergasted, thanked them profusely, and then promptly forgot my original errand and returned to share the news of this kindness with my wife.

Later that evening, I sought to catch up with the family with whom

we intended to share our offering, when the other folks cut me off. These people had already given us \$1,500, would be leaving soon for the mission field, and they informed me that they felt impressed to give us another \$1,000! Again, I was overwhelmed with gratitude. I urged them to make sure that this was not merely their feelings and that God was leading in this decision, but of course, we would be thankful to receive their gift. By this time the other family had left without knowing that we were going to give an offering of \$500 to their project.

The next morning Beth and I met the newly accepted couple at the AFM office. I pulled them aside and told them how I had prayed that if God wanted us to give them the \$500, then He would have to impress Beth to share without any prompting from me. They, too, marveled at God's goodness in answering our prayers on their behalf. We shared a check for \$500 with them, they thanked us very graciously, and the husband said, "Thank you so very much! God is going to bless you ten-fold for this kindness."

When I returned to the couch where Beth waited, the secretary for AFM came up to us rather excitedly with an envelope in her hand. She held out the envelope and said that we needed to see what was in it. We opened the envelope and inside we found a check for \$5,000! God had indeed blessed us ten-fold, and more! (Baxter 2015)

Who but God could multiply one gift of \$500 into \$8,000! What an amazing God we serve!

Another missionary candidate raising funds shares this story about how God clearly defines the role that God was to have in the funding process.

When we began fundraising we felt very confident that we had many friends and family who would undoubtedly want to support this mission. Upon returning home we started calling them right away to tell how God had called us and to ask for their support. To our surprise the first ten people we called said they did not want to support, and one woman even said she didn't believe us. Confused and shocked we sat down to pray. Realizing that we felt very confident in our own strength, we asked for forgiveness and prayed that God would be the one to raise the funding for His mission.

The next Sabbath we broke the news to our home church, how God had called us back to foreign missions. When church was over, a man approached us saying he would like to support us and wanted to talk with us at his home. As we met with him he said, "Earlier this week I realized I am too old to serve in the mission field so I prayed that God would send someone I could support, and there you were." He gave us a one-time gift and also signed up to be our second monthly donor.

A few weeks after that, we gave our first presentation on the

mission which was also at our home church. After it was over a man came up to me and said, "You don't know who I am because I don't attend church here. My wife and I woke up this morning and felt impressed by the Holy Spirit to visit this church today but we weren't sure why. After we learned there would be a presentation this afternoon on missions, we remembered praying earlier in the week that God would send us missionaries to support." God had answered our prayers, making it clear that it was His mission and He would be the one to raise the support. (Coal 2015)

Even after leaning dependently on God, missionary candidates still have a work to do. They perform their part and allow God the freedom to show his power. The lessons learned in being dependent upon God through support raising are then easily transferred to other aspects in their cross-cultural ministry.

One of the early Protestant missionaries to China, James O. Fraser (1886-1938), discovered the power of prayer for his work. "I am feeling more and more that it is, after all, just the prayers of God's people that call down blessing upon the work, whether they are directly engaged in it or not. . . . Solid missionary work is done on our knees." (Crossman 1994:35, 36).

I have found in my work as the Development Director at AFM that as donors engage in the financial support of missionaries, they become personally invested in the work and their prayers multiply what God can accomplish.

Let us never forget that the greatest thing we can do for God or for man is to pray. For we can accomplish far more by our prayers than by our work. Prayer is omnipotent: it can do anything that God can do! When we pray God works. All fruitfulness in service is the outcome of prayer, of the worker's prayers, or of those who are holding up holy hands on his behalf. (Unknown Christian 1986:18)

Not that our prayers change God's intentions to further his kingdom. Instead, prayer allows God to do things that he would not do unless asked. "The fact remains that, when we pray for others, somehow or other it opens the way for God to influence those we pray for. God needs our prayers, or He would not beg us to pray" (1986:103).

We are to be "instant in prayer," to "continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." Romans 12:12; Colossians 4:2. Peter exhorts believers to be "sober, and watch unto prayer." 1 Peter 4:7. Paul directs, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Philippians 4:6. "But ye, beloved," says Jude, "praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in

the love of God.” Jude 20, 21. Unceasing prayer is the unbroken union of the soul with God, so that life from God flows into our life; and from our life, purity and holiness flow back to God. (White 1892:97, 98).

More than anything else it is God’s desire that his people keep themselves in the love of God! This is the true purpose of prayer—to communicate with God as a friend—but to also allow him to do his work in our lives is even more essential. In this way, we choose to open ourselves and our ministries to his work.

We are coming to a loving Father to Whom we owe all, and Whom we love with all our heart, and to Whom we may come repeatedly. In cashing our checks at the bank of heaven we desire chiefly His honor and His glory. We wish to do only that which is pleasing in His sight. (Unknown Christian 1986:65, 66).

Prayer allows us to align ourselves with what is pleasing in God’s sight. And this is true on a personal level as well as on an organizational level. When we are aligned with God, he supplies whatever is necessary for his call. In fact, “as the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings” (White 1990:331).

Years ago my husband and I asked for an application form to be missionaries with AFM. When I learned that I would have to raise funds, I promptly shut the door to applying. Years later God orchestrated events so that I became the director of development at AFM, in charge of the very thing I feared! Talk about irony. I came to AFM kicking and screaming. But as I surrendered to God, he revealed a ministry much deeper than anything I could have envisioned.

Before speaking on the phone or meeting with a donor, I try to pray for God’s timing and guidance in how to best minister to the person. This has led to many situations that I would describe as stranger than fiction. In other words no one but God could create the circumstances in which his care could shine forth. Once I made an impromptu visit to an elderly donor because I was never able to reach her by phone. It was a frigid, sub-zero day. When I arrived at her house, I discovered she had fallen outside and was crawling into the house! As I picked up her phone to call for help, I discovered her phone had been disconnected and she did not know it! Another time, I called and a donor had just lost their spouse. She begged for me to talk and pray with her as the funeral home prepared to remove the body of her husband.

I have learned that when I find myself in an awkward spot, I can stop

and pray like Nehemiah. God does amazing things in those moments. He longs to minister to his children and provide for them, and occasionally I have the privilege of being there when it happens. Praying is a two-way communication. Many times we do all the talking, but if we listen, God will orchestrate our days. I make many mistakes along the way. I have personally learned that “just as a plant may die for lack of watering, so may a genuine work of God die and rot for lack of prayer” (Crossman 1994:167). But when I hear God speak and obey, nothing is sweeter than knowing I am exactly where I am supposed to be.

Somehow, when one is in harmony with God’s will, he provides the things necessary for ministry. And the only way to be in God’s will is to spend enough time with him to know him intimately. All the praise goes to him as the source of all good things. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (Jas 1:17). As you depend on God, remember that “my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19).

When it comes to the role of prayer in a ministry like AFM that is dependent on donations, align yourself with God through prayer and he will take care of the donations.

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