THINGS HOME MISSION CAN LEARN: PRAY

Posted on November 30, 2017 by Eddie

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Category: Christian Life

When we left our jobs to go to Bible College back in 1984 we realised that we would need people to pray for us, so we sent out our first prayer letter. The hand written letters, were soon replaced by ones produced on a manual typewriter and after a couple of years we switched to producing them on a computer and sending the printout home to be photocopied and distributed. These days, our monthly-ish news is sent out via email; I can't remember when we last did a printed letter (you can sign up at the foot of this page, if you are interested). Though the format has changed, the need for prayer has not. Missionaries need people praying for them - especially at the times when they are too tired or discouraged to pray much for themselves.

Of course, this isn't news to anyone. Church planters and those doing mission in the UK know that they need people to pray for them, because we have a God who answers prayer.

However, working among the Kouya my understanding of prayer underwent a subtle change. Listening to my Kouya brothers and sisters praying, I realised that they addressed whole areas of life that I didn't think much about. They saw spiritual causes behind diseases, they prayed against demonic powers in the bush and at work in the village and they continually prayed for protection from the work of Satan.

It would be easy - very easy - for a Western rationalist to dismiss all of this. I'm a biologist, I know what causes diseases! However, one night, when the men of the village performed a sacred mask dance in the village, we felt a sense of oppression that is hard to describe. The air seemed to grow dark and heavy and we felt ourselves in the presence of something very evil - my biology degree had no answers.

Little by little, I came to realise that my Kouya friends were aware of a spiritual reality that more or less passed me by. There are principalities and powers out there that are at war with us and we need to take them seriously.

These things may be more obvious in a pioneer situation such as among the Kouya, but they are issues in the UK, too. We need to be aware of a spiritual reality that as good, scientific Westerners we have been taught does not exist.

There are two equal and opposite mistakes that we can make. Firstly, we can ignore the spiritual realm altogether. We an see life in terms of cause and effect. Ultimately, this reduces mission to a series of techniques; do the right things and you'll get the right results. The other mistake is to see a demon under every bush and spend all of our time naming, rebuking and rejecting various powers. There are plenty of books out there that take this approach.

CS Lewis caught this dichotomy in the Screwtape Letters when he wrote:

> *There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy*

> *interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.*

There is a fine line to tread here; but people involved in mission in the UK must not ignore the reality of spiritual warfare. Â When a minister or church planter is beset by huge number of debilitating problems all at once; there may well be more at play than blind coincidence. When people are extremely resistant to the gospel message, it is probably more than just an intellectual refusal to assent to what they have heard.

Of course, we also need to be aware of the work of God's Spirit; he is the one who convicts people and draws them to Christ and we need to pray for his involvement in our lives and the lives of those we are seeking to reach. And the good news, is that the powers of hell were defeated at the cross. They are fighting a rearguard action, awaiting their ultimate defeat when Christ returns - but rearguard actions can cause real damage and real hurt and we need to take them seriously.

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- Introduction:Â I believe that the skills and experience of cross-cultural missionaries are crucial to the future of the church in the UK: the start of a blog series....
- Go:Â When push comes to shove, there is one basic difference between long-term, cross-cultural missionaries and the average church member. ...
- Study:Â How well do we understand the culture that surrounds us?...
- Contextualise:Â When Paul spoke to a Jewish audience, he started off with the story of the Jewish nation, when speaking to Greeks, he worked from inscriptions on statues and Greek poetry. ...
- Serve:Â If you just preach the word but donâ€™t do the deeds then you are not credible, if you just do the deeds without preaching the word then you are not audible....
- Don't Look Down: Looking down on a class of people, and holding them in contempt for their reading habits, has far more to do with liberal, middle-class prejudice than it has to do with Christianity.Â ...
- Speak:Â To a newcomer, a phrase such as "we will now enter into a time of worship" conveys far more background information about the person using it than it does about what is going to happen next in the service. ...
- Religion:Â Learn from people who have been there and done that....
- Stories:Â Taking one of Jesus' amazingly creative parables and turning it into an alliterated, three-point, logical sermon has to be the ultimate in literate processing. ...
- Pray:Â It would be easy - very easy - for a Western rationalist to dismiss all of this. I'm a biologist, I know what causes diseases! ...