

Which comes first: strategy or prayer?

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OC Intentional

In theory, I suppose the answer to the question I pose in the headline is obvious. In actual practice, I'm not so sure most of us live up to our theological ideals. We probably struggle more with this dilemma than we realize.

My encounter with this duality surfaced way back in the sixties. I had just completed a fascinating, life-changing study at Dr. Donald McGavran's Institute for Church Growth. I had learned *strategy* from the master.

But now I was documenting and analyzing the very rapid growth of the Foursquare Church in the Philippines. While their leaders had never studied church growth strategy, they were growing 36 times faster per foreign missionary than any comparable group!

What they did have was prayer for the sick, prayer for infilling of the Holy Spirit, prayer for provision of local resources, prayer for conversions and rapid growth, and lots more prayer besides.

So which comes first, prayer or strategy? A struggle for the proper balance has continued throughout my 50 years of ministry. For example, I believe the Lord gave us the DAWN strategy that has now become a world-wide movement with many hundreds of thousands of churches planted in its wake. But where does prayer come in?

In a recent issue of "Global Prayer News," Peter Wagner affirms my own conviction that "We live in the first generation in all human history that has the realistic potential of completing the Great Commission."

What is required of good stewards in this state of great responsiveness in vast regions of the world; however, is not just increasing our growth rates according to solid church growth principles. What the times call for is dynamic growth of exponential proportions. For this, we truly need the balance between solid Biblical strategy and great power in prayer.

In recent decades we have seen McGavran's church growth principles become widespread throughout the missions community. Then, in 1974 at the Lausanne Congress of World Evangelization, Ralph Winter fired the opening shot that awakened us to the vast number of people groups still untouched by the gospel. In our day, the cry of the DAWN Movement to see Saturation Church Planting become the generally accepted and fervently practiced strategy for completing the Great Commission, has resounded throughout the nations.

None of these have yet reached a level of full implementation. Perhaps they were in need of integration and empowerment by the massive prayer movements now emerging on every hand. Prayer that would break down strongholds, that would anoint strategies

and movements, and would unite and empower the body of Christ in a great, final push to at last see the discipling of all nations become a reality.

Now, to the glory of God, such integrated prayer has been, has mobilized prayer on an international level beyond anything previously seen in history. In his periodic “Global Prayer News,” for example, Wagner relates a continuing stream of massive prayer events and movements in nations and regions all over the world.

Emerging within these unprecedented prayer movements are very practical, realistic, and Biblical prayer strategies and approaches. One closest to home for me is the Luke 10:2b Movement, visible on the horizon the size of a man’s hand, but with the potential to integrate prayer and strategy in a new tsunami of evangelism and church planting. For this story, see the accompanying article.

Complete the Great Commission? Jesus told us how (Luke 10:2b)!

John White and Kenny Moore are two friends of mine that have a passion for completion of the Great Commission—and the DAWN Saturation Church Planting strategy for making it happen. What they didn’t have was a clear picture of just where to begin.

Then they had breakfast together on October 28, 2002, and the answer leaped out at them.

Though their harvest field is relatively small—the state of Colorado with tentacles reaching out to other parts of the U.S. and beyond—their idea is big enough to fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. Such an idea, as might be expected, comes from the mouth of the Lord of the harvest himself.

So Few for So Many

While lingering over the last cup of coffee for the morning, their thoughts were turned to the ninth and tenth chapters of Luke. They observed that this was where the Lord was really shifting gears, where the foundation was laid for all that would follow till the end of the age.

Up to this point, the Lord was doing the ministry. Now he was sending out the 12 (Luke 9:1-6) and then the 72 others (Luke 10:1) to prepare the way for every village and town Jesus would enter. Now there were 42 two-man teams to establish the presence of Christ—to plant churches—everywhere.

“I would have been ecstatic,” John told me in a phone interview, “if I had 42 church-planting teams for the state of Colorado. But what Jesus was saying really astounded us.

‘This isn’t very many,’ was his point. ‘The fields are ripe but these 42 teams are so few.’”

Luke 10:2a identified the first critical component, that is, the laborers. The harvest is not the problem. The critical missing component is an adequate number of harvest workers. How do we get enough apostolic church planters? Luke 10:2b says to do one thing: ask the Lord of the harvest for them.

They Prayed Together 800 Times!

White, a former pastor who now humbly refers to himself as a “house church coach,” and Moore, Southern Baptist Director of Church Planting for the State of Colorado, at that point covenanted with each other to pray this “10:2b” prayer together every day possible from that moment on. So every day, either John would call Kenny or Kenny would call John to pray. If they didn’t connect, they would leave their prayer on voice mail.

In the following 30 months, they have followed through on this pledge about 700 or 800 times—and encouraged others to do the same. For once having made the personal commitment, White and Moore determined to share the concept at every opportunity, whether in speaking engagements, personal conversations, or other contacts. The result is that there are now, around the world, between 200 and 300 praying 10:2b with a partner virtually every day.

“And the results have been amazing,” says White. “We’re to the point where we get a phone call or email almost every day from someone saying something like this: ‘It’s in my heart to plant a church. How do I do that? Can you help me?’”

“Just in the last week,” White told me, “I’ve talked to people in New York, Minnesota, Indiana, and three different sections of Denver. These are people calling *me*. I’m not out recruiting.”

Moore, whose job is to recruit church planters, reports a similar experience. While he used to get six or eight people over the course of six months who would indicate a desire to start a new church, he now has a steady stream of inquiries. In fact, Moore estimates there have been around 100 Southern Baptist churches established in Colorado alone from the time he and White began praying 10:2b together.

Tim Pynes, for an example from John White, had been on the staff of a large, post-modern church in Denver. With so many programs in this mega-facility, Pynes found he had merely turned into a project manager. “This is not what I signed up for,” he told White. “I want to invest in the lives of people.

Through a set of circumstances obviously orchestrated by the Lord, Pynes became an answer to a 10:2b prayer and now meets with White on a weekly basis. Result? Eight house churches in the mile high city of Denver.

White has other stories of house churches being planted among Filipino, Hispanic, African American, Hmong, Cambodian, Russian, and other groups in Denver as direct or indirect answers to 10:2b prayers.

Nor are the contacts confined to North America. Guy Muse, a Southern Baptist missionary in Ecuador, for example, since May of 2004 has been encouraging all his house church people to pray the 10:2b prayer on a daily basis. In that month alone 30 new congregations were established.

Other unintended outcomes of their partnership in prayer have been a great increase in their faith, the building of a very strong relationship between them, and a strong desire to become more missional.

A Simple Prayer. Or Is It?

Wonderful results, yes. And a very simple prayer. Or is it?

“After we got three or four days into this back in October of ’02,” White told me, “We realized we had no clue as to how to pray this prayer. Do we just say, ‘Lord, this is John and Kenny again asking you to send more apostolic workers to Denver?’”

So they added a second prayer, “Holy Spirit, teach us how to pray this prayer.” God’s answers have given profound insights into prayer that produces the kind of results recounted above.

The first among many challenges the Lord gave them was from Luke 18, the parable of the widow lady. She brought her request to the unrighteous judge who simply dismissed her. “Who are you?” he seemed to say. “You have no standing, no political clout. Go away.”

But she would not be put off. Day after day she makes her request until finally the judge throws up his hands and says, “I’m going to answer your request because you have worn me out.”

“So we heard the Lord saying of 10:2b, that this was not a one-time request, but a prayer to be uttered *relentlessly*,” White told me. “That’s why Kenny and I have prayed this prayer seven or eight hundred times!”

The second thing the Lord taught them came from the words “send forth.” The Greek word for this, they discovered, was a very forceful, almost violent, term. It is the word used when casting out a demon, for example.

This spoke to them of motivation. They were not to ask for potential laborers who had to be persuaded or convinced, i.e. no arm twisting. In response, God time and time again brought them people who were already highly motivated for planting a church or even a network of churches.

A third thing the Lord taught them was to focus on specific geographical areas. The 42 teams the Lord sent out were undoubtedly given specific assignments, they felt. So they have begun praying the Lord would give them 10:2b prayer teams for each of the 63 counties of Colorado and each of the 77 distinct neighborhoods of Denver.

In concluding remarks, White assured me that once you have identified a highly motivated laborer in answer to your prayer to the Lord of the harvest, the rest is relatively easy: training, research, strategy, provision, etc.

While this approach has been modeled on a relatively small scale, White and Moore are convinced that in Luke 10:2b Jesus was revealing his unified strategy and spiritual dynamic for the expansion of his Kingdom and completion of the Great Commission.

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