

In this article the writer hopes to show that praying for the miraculous conversion of large numbers of non-Christians—even “the inhabitants of entire cities” (as promised in Zechariah 8) is what missionaries mean by “movement” praying. Praying that God would miraculously convert great numbers of people, as He promised in the Bible, *actually increases the amount of joy in heaven and in their own hearts*. Those of us who identify with Christian hedonism—“the pursuit of maximum joy in God both in quality and quantity”—are thrilled to pray and labor for great numbers of new Christians coming out of Islam and other non-Christian religions.

Christian hedonists pray the hundreds of mission promises in the Bible. Paul’s mastery of the mission promises in the Bible is so great that he readily gathers a truckload of them in his letter to the Romans, chapter 15:9-12:

It is written: “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name” (Psalm 18:49). Again, it says, “Rejoice, O Gentiles with his people (Deuteronomy 32:43).” And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, glorify him, all you peoples (Psalm 117:1).” And again, Isaiah says, “The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the Gentiles, and the Gentiles will hope in him (Isaiah 11:10).”

Paul tells us *why there are so many mission promises in the Bible*: It is “so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy” (Romans 15:8). *O Lord, do what you said would happen in Romans 15: convert thousands of non-Christians from among the unreached peoples, so that they may glorify you for your mercy.*

Christian hedonists pray the mission promises for two reasons. First, Christian hedonists pray with an attitude of *adoration for the supremacy of God*. They pray knowing that all the mission promises in the Bible will come true *even if not one single human being believes in them today*. God reigns! God is infinitely worthy because “He does not lie” (Titus 1:2)! Pray like this: “O God, do among the unreached peoples what you said in Psalm 102:15: “The nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth will tremble before your glory.” Second, Christian hedonists *actually increase the joy of the Lord Himself, and their own joy*, when they “remind” God of his promises. *Pray the promises of God and tell Him you trust him; this greatly increases God’s joy*. Therefore, “standing on the promises” is twice blessed: it blesses the One we pray to, because we speak His promises back to Him; and it blesses the one who prays, because God’s supremacy and goodness, grounded in His promises, will “guard our hearts and minds” from worrying over the future. *Our own happiness increases* when we pray to God, the God who has made promises that we can count on, promises that express His goodness and love and power. Therefore, his command that we ought to pray is no burden. Far from it! Praying the promises becomes our highest duty *and* the duty that actually *brings us* the most joy.

Movement Praying is Biblical. Great numbers of non-Christians will come to faith and tell others the good news of salvation. For example, Zechariah foretells a time when the inhabitants of one city will actually go to the inhabitants of another city, saying “Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts; I am going” (Zechariah 8:20-21). The marks of a movement are all here. First, there is a cascade of new believers as they start spreading the news. A great turning will occur, in numbers so great that the missionaries will be astonished. Second, the missionaries often do not live to see this day. They preached their hearts out, and saw almost nothing for their efforts. Some have

received a martyr's reward. But this is not the end! A better day is coming, and on that day "many shall come from east and west and take their places with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Third, the movement that Zechariah foretold began when the bravest believer stands up and says, "Let us go at once; I am going." I saw this happen as a missionary in northern Iraq in the 1990s. For years we had seen little fruit from our efforts to advance the gospel among the Kurds. Then, one new convert, filled with the zeal of the Lord, said in public that he was finished with Islam and would follow Christ no matter the cost. Threats against his life were very real. One night he asked me to write his last will and testament. He was the brave one, the "man of peace," who made the breakthrough possible. Dozens followed him into the faith. Examples of miraculous movements can be found in the history of the expansion of Christianity. Bertha, a Christian queen residing in Kent, England, was the "woman of peace" who invited missionaries to come from Europe. The missionaries came, led by Augustine, in 596 AD. Bertha's husband, a pagan king, was converted. The missionaries preached; they also introduced new grain that provided a more secure source of food. They began to die in the foreign climate of England. But the pagans were converted. On Christmas Day in 597 AD, 10,000 English were baptized in the Medway River. *O God, let the nations be glad! Do among the Baluch Muslims of Pakistan what you did among the English on that long ago day.*

Pray the mission promises because there is still a mission front line. Missionaries must advance the gospel where millions perish for lack of knowledge. The best future we can make—the most joy we can create—is to preach the gospel that all might be saved. So we pray:

O God do in our day among the Muslims and Hindus what your servant Zechariah promised would happen, when the inhabitants of entire cities would tell the inhabitants of other cities, "Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts."

Now is the time to pray for a great ingathering. Many scriptures have inspired missionaries to believe that *now is the time* to pray God's miraculous movement promises: "O God, do what you promised in Isaiah 55, "Behold you shall call nations that you know not, and they will run to you." Pray for movements because "the fields are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35). "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14). "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9). Christian hedonists who pray for movements have faith in our Lord's words, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples" (John 15:8). Praying like this releases a flood of joy in heaven and in our own hearts. The passionate prayer of Christian hedonists is, "O God, open their hearts, so that tens of thousands more may glorify you for your mercy!" No wonder Jordan Grooms said, "If God calls me to be a missionary, I will not stoop to be a king."

Criticism. By using the word "movements," we probably do not all mean the same thing. What I mean is *evangelizing* unreached peoples in order to save great numbers of souls, *establishing* great numbers of new churches, and *catalyzing* new disciples who make many more disciples "who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). This is what missionaries mean by disciple-making movements.

If there are new disciples, there must also be new churches.

What is church planting? The work of making disciples is not complete until churches are established, and elders appointed. In Acts 14:21-24 Luke gives us a very useful summary of practical church planting. First. "They preached the gospel and won a large number of disciples."

Second. "They returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch." The missionary team is keeps moving in order to start many churches.

Third. Paul and Barnabas went about "strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Don't let new believers fall into easy-believism; teach them the cost of discipleship. It takes much time and agony to establish true faith in new believers.

Fourth. "They appointed elders with prayer and fasting, committing them to the Lord in whom they had believed." Missionaries do not *become* elders; they *appoint* them. It was important to Paul that Titus stay in Crete after winning a large number of converts. "Set in order the things that remain," Paul wrote, "and appoint elders." These are the essentials of planting new churches: Preach the word. Win a large number of disciples. Teach them to endure tribulations. Pray, fast, and commit new believers to the Lord. Appoint elders. The missionary visits them again and continues to give counsel.

Bible Study. One important part of starting movements of churches is studying the Bible. God's word is a sword, cutting through a thicket of false ideas that fill the minds of unbelievers. Trained teachers help assure that sound doctrine is taught; Paul commended Timothy to remember the teachers of his youth. But the Bible itself in the hands of inquirers is also a proven means of discipleship. Paul tells Timothy that the "*Scriptures themselves are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*" (2 Timothy 3:15). There is great power in listening to the Scriptures themselves, read aloud over and over, and discussing a Bible passage without a formal teacher. C. S. Lewis wrote that sometimes students are able to answer one another's questions *more* than the learned teacher. "It often happens," Lewis said, "that two schoolboys can solve difficulties in their work for one another better than the master can." When you took the problem to the master, Lewis observed, "he was very likely to explain what you understood already, to add a great deal of information which you didn't want, and say nothing at all about the thing that was puzzling you." A fellow-pupil can help more, Lewis writes, "because he knows less than the master."¹

Audio Recordings. A great advantage for today's missionaries is the phenomenon of audio recordings of the Bible. Now available in hundreds of languages, the digital age has made possible for unprecedented numbers of non-Christians to hear God's word. Recordings have made it possible for families and friends to listen to God's word over and over, and actually memorize great quantities of God's word. In this way, non-literate people are becoming "wise for salvation." Let me illustrate.

A People Movement in the Middle East. Layla closed the door and fled the black-flagged vehicles that were coming her way. She and her husband and their children took to the road on foot, heading eastward, away from the rat-a-tat bursts of rifle fire. She could not outrun the approaching peril. But then, seemingly from nowhere, a white pickup truck arrived, and the driver slowed down. "Get in the back," he said to Layla and her family. Off they zoomed, heading north to the city of refuge.

Once safe, Layla and her family found themselves sitting in a tent, like thousands of other refugees. They had nothing but the clothes they wore. How did this happen? Bad enough to lose all that one owns; worse to lose hope that the future would ever be bright again.

A man named Mercy came to each tent, distributing food and asking what needs the families had. He gave Layla's family a copy of the gospel of John. One evening, Layla had a vision; Christ told her that

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 1st American ed. (New York,: Harcourt, 1958). Introduction

Mercy would show her family the way to put their faith in Him. Layla's husband did not see the vision; he was reluctant to believe what she told him. They feared what other Muslims would think, but they began to read the Gospel of John.

A week went by before they saw Mercy again. Layla and her husband asked him to teach them the Bible. Mercy started a Bible study in their tent. He gave them a recording of the Bible in Arabic that they could insert in their phone. It was much easier for them to listen to the Bible over and over in this way. They memorized many narratives, beginning in Genesis.

When they listened to the story of Jesus Christ's crucifixion, they cried with sorrow and felt overwhelmed by God's love. They knelt down and surrendered their lives to Him.

Since then, Layla and her family have studied the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. The Scriptures and Mercy have been their teachers. They asked Mercy to guide them in sharing with other refugee families. Miraculously, they started 50 Bible studies in the city of refuge. "We were saved by a stranger in a pickup truck," Layla said. "Now God has given us a way to save others."

Desire to obey. Layla and her family learned that obedience is an essential mark of discipleship. Obeying God was life-giving to Layla, as she began to do what her heavenly Father said, *even before* she fully understood. Some express concern that inquirers, who are not yet Christian, may be trying to "earn their way to heaven" by obeying God. I have watched to see if this is so; I do not think it is. When the Holy Spirit opens hearts, obedience is usually childlike and humble: "Give me understanding, that I may obey thy word, and keep it with all my heart" (Psalm 119:105). Obedience is good. Be like Paul, who gladly spoke of what God had accomplished through him "to win obedience from the Gentiles" (Romans 15:18).

Summary. The essentials of movement thinking among missionaries are these: First, pray that God would open hearts, that thousands of Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. Second, sow the word of God everywhere, asking him that you might win large numbers of disciples. Third, keep asking non-Christians to take steps toward following Jesus our Lord: "Have you studied today? Have you heard from our heavenly Father today? Have you obeyed Him?" Fourth, ask, "Do you have friends or family who will study with you?" If most say "No," do not lose heart. Perhaps one in twenty will say, "Yes, I can study with my friend," or "Yes, with my family." Look for faithful men, faithful women, who will teach others also. Ask God for the "person of peace" who will "go first" in his public testimony. All movements to plant churches and make disciples can be traced back to these sound Biblical principles.

Therefore, pray the mission promises of the Bible. Pray for whole cities to come to faith, as happened when Jonah preached in the city of Nineveh, as happened in Samaria after our Lord met the woman at the well. Movements keep going by themselves, as believers tell others the good news of Jesus Christ.

We know that trusting God increases His good pleasure. Read God's promises back to him. This kind of praying is our highest duty *and* the duty that actually *brings us* the most joy as well. After the missionaries have done all they can do, they can count on God's mission promises. Let us pray for our missionaries; and let us pray for movements.

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