



In the Name of
JESUS

**Power to Pray
for People
and Places**

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CHAPTER 1

The Need for a Strategic Revolution

A few years ago, I had the privilege of visiting the ancient city of Ephesus, in what is now Turkey. I was astonished by what I saw. Here was the magnificent Curetes Street, with public latrines and shrines to foreign gods; the Odeon, or concert hall that sat three thousand people; the facade of the famous Celsus Library, one of the largest in the ancient world; the lower *agora*, or marketplace; and the famous Great Theater, with capacity for twenty-five thousand people, where two thousand years ago the Ephesians chanted for hours in favor of the goddess Diana against the new God of heaven preached by the apostle Paul (Acts 19:23–34).

But what astonished me even more than this magnificent ancient archaeological site was reflecting on the amazingly successful ministry of Paul in such a large, cosmopolitan, Christless city, where the temple of Diana was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Ephesus was both “the most magnificent” and “the most corrupt” of the cities of Asia. It was a city reeking with spiritualism and demonic practices.¹ How did Paul do it? How did the apostle, in less than three years (Acts 19:8–10), turn one of the most influential cities in the world from paganism to Christianity? The Christians in Ephesus were legendary for their “first love” (Revelation 2:1–4), Jesus Christ. Ephesus became the center of operations for the last living apostle, John, and the church there, the most vibrant in the first century. Paul’s achievement would be the equivalent of today’s Tokyo (pop. 37 million) becoming mostly Christian through the ministry and presence of a few dozen missionaries!

One of the keys may be found in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, written from a Roman prison years after his time in Ephesus. After describing the components of the armor of God to be worn by the soldiers of Jesus (Ephesians 6:10–17), the apostle requested the Ephesian Christians to pray “for me,” as he said, “that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains” (verses 19, 20). Amazing! He did not ask his friends to pray for his release or for better treatment

while in chains, but for power to witness while still in prison! And it worked. Ellen White says a number of the people from the household of Nero, the Roman emperor at the time, converted to Christianity because of Paul's witness.²

Paul was a man who prayed for doors of opportunity to open for the gospel (Colossians 4:2–4). He excused his delay to the city of Corinth with these words: “I will tarry at Ephesus. . . . For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Corinthians 16:8, 9). Ephesus was ripe for a change, he thought, and with God, all things are possible, but it is not easy.

What Paul brought about in Ephesus was a revolution, and the revolution began and was sustained by prayer. And he also recognized that the enemies of God would fight to keep their city in darkness. Much prayer was needed.

The challenge today

As a denomination, we are working in 212 of 235 countries and areas of the world, and as of 2020, we number over 21 million members. Many thousands join the church each year because faithful laity, pastors, and leaders share their faith and are ready to bless others and because churches are still willing to open their doors to share the three angels' messages. However, more than 75 percent of our baptisms come from only four of the fifteen territories comprising our world church, and several divisions have seen consistent gain registering barely above zero. Yes, 0 percent, by comparison.³ The truth is that despite progress—a narrowing ratio between population and church members that stands at 356 to 1 today⁴—we keep falling behind, statistically speaking.

Each year, approximately 137.7 million people are born, and 57.2 million people die.⁵ That means there are 80.5 million *additional* people in the world every year. And of course, that number continues to increase. That figure is almost four times the entire membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today. According to church statistics, accounting for losses, between 2017 and 2018, church membership increased by only 687,432.⁶ We praise God for each new member! But how does an increase of less than a million members compare with 80 million new people being added to the world each year?

Obviously, wonderful institutions, thousands of young people attending schools in our vast and recognized educational network system, efficient methods and resources for evangelism, and a global organization that is hard to match are not enough to make *substantive* progress. We make progress, yes, but nothing out of the ordinary. What is needed is a true revolution—a strategic revolution that may need to be as simple as it is efficient.⁷

What we need is to walk and pray together for God to open the hearts of

the people in our cities. Worldwide, more people live in cities today than in the country or in small towns. In many of the populous Asian countries, more people have lived in cities now for decades.

Cities were never the invention of God. The first city builder was Cain after he killed his brother Abel and left the presence of God (Genesis 4:16, 17). Ancient cities were meant to be fortresses to protect citizens against their enemies. But today, cities are full of danger, corruption, and sin of every imaginable sort. Sodom and Gomorrah were two cities God was forced to destroy, their corruption being irreversible (Genesis 18:20, 21; 19:1–17). But the few inhabitants that escaped were saved by the prayerful intercession of Abraham (Genesis 18:22–33). Nineveh was a huge city that God saved because a reluctant evangelist interceded on God's behalf (Jonah 1–4).

Think of such cities as Mumbai, Shanghai, Berlin, or New York. Do the millions who live there need rescuing from the claws of Satan? Think of cities such as Buenos Aires, Sydney, Johannesburg, or Jakarta. Are those cities known as *Adventist* cities? Think of the cities of Tokyo, Cairo, Bangkok, and Hong Kong. Are all their citizens aware of the wonderful offer made by the Creator and Redeemer of the world? Think of cities such as Seoul, Nairobi, Rio de Janeiro, or Paris. Are the three angels' messages the flag that flies over these massive populations? The answer is . . . no. There are cities like Sao Paulo, Mexico City, and Manila that have hundreds and even thousands of Adventist churches within their borders, but even they would not be recognized as *Adventist* cities.

Take, for instance, the division where I serve, comprising the countries of China, Japan, North and South Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia.⁸ These six countries alone have a population of 1.6 billion people. Less than 4 percent are Christians, and less than 0.05 percent are Adventists! No wonder my division describes itself as “the most challenging division.” Twenty-five of the fifty largest cities in the world are in this division. When Westerners visit China or Japan for the first time, they see a number of people in the subways or on the streets that they could not have imagined.

My point is this: the work to get the gospel to all the world—and most of the world lives in cities now—is incredibly challenging. If we continue as we have, working hard, creating resources to train and to share, establishing schools and hospitals and churches, and praying for God to bless our plans, we will never finish the work of evangelizing the world. Another six thousand years from now, we may still be here. What we do is simply not enough. But the Lord told us He will come when the gospel goes to all the world (Matthew 24:14).

Prayer is the strategy

Perhaps we need to think of prayer as being the strategy. We usually think of prayer in a supporting role to ministry, but when it comes to these large cities in the world, our first strategic step should be a prayer plan that works.

Prayer walking our cities may be the simplest of all strategies. Other strategies can also be implemented, as we will see. Generally, every Adventist knows how to walk and how to talk. Prayer walking is something everyone in the church can do: the youth with their friends after school, the young mothers staying home with their children, the retired people who walk for their health, or those who walk as part of their lunch break at work. Everyone can do this. Teams of three or four people can prayer walk the same area of town several times a week for about thirty minutes. They can pray aloud, as if talking with one another, or pray silently as they walk. They can pray for every person they see on the sidewalk, in the restaurants and shops, at the bus stops, and in the subway stations. They can pray for their neighbors and for those who live in the houses and apartments they see. "God, in the name of Jesus, we ask You to bless the woman waiting to cross the street who appears so sad and worn out. May Your Spirit reach her to give her hope today. May You direct her thoughts, somehow, to what things could be like in her life rather than what they may be right now. Find any excuse, Lord, to bless her and for her to be able to recognize that such blessing comes from above. Keep the enemy from taking further advantage of her today. In Jesus' wonderful name. Amen." It's that simple.

That was Hudson Taylor's strategy. Taylor spent fifty-one years as a missionary to China. He was the founder of the China Inland Mission, through which he brought over eight hundred additional missionaries to that great country, began 125 Christian schools, and led over eighteen thousand converts to Christ. He sacrificed much for China and prayed much for China. One time, he and some of his missionary colleagues were in Taiping on market day. His heart was "moved by the crowds that filled the streets for two or three miles, so that we could hardly walk," he remembered. And here comes the strategy: "I was constrained to retire to the city wall and cry to God to have mercy on the people, to open their hearts and give us an entrance among them."

Overwhelmed by the numbers of people groping in darkness who desperately needed the Light of God, he prayed. He prayed for a door of entrance to their hearts. They didn't even know they were in darkness. But the Christian missionary did, and that's why he prayed. You see, Taylor saw that great multitude and couldn't know how to begin. Whom would he approach? What would he say? Where would he start? So he prayed for God to open the door. And a door opened *immediately*.

His next paragraph reads this way: “Without any seeking on our part, we were brought into touch with at least four anxious souls.” Then, he tells about one of them: “A man found us out, I know not how, and followed me to our boat. I asked him in and inquired his name. ‘My name is Dzing,’ he replied. ‘But the question which distresses me, and to which I find no answer, is—What am I to do with my sins? Our scholars tell us that there is no future state, but I find it hard to believe them. . . . Oh, sir, I lie on my bed and think. I sit alone in the daytime and think . . . but I cannot tell what is to be done about my sins. I am seventy-two years of age. I cannot expect to finish another decade. . . . Can you tell me what to do with my sins?’ ” Hudson Taylor replied, “I can indeed.”¹⁰

The same thing that happened to Taylor can happen to us because people are still groping in darkness and because God still answers prayers of faith. Note three things here: (1) Taylor and his friends walked among the multitude and prayed for people they saw that day, praying for a door of entry to their hearts. (2) Four people *approached them* seeking light. (3) In the case of the older man named Dzing, his burden was twofold: what happens after death and what to do with one’s sins.

Today’s multitudes also wonder what will happen after death and what they must do to atone for their sins and mistakes. Their burden is the same as that of billions of others over thousands of years of human history. We must connect with these people. The problem is that we don’t know who they are. We cannot go knocking from door to door, asking, “Do you know what happens after death or what to do with your sins?” The police would soon be after us for bothering people while displaying what many would label as religious fanaticism.

But God knows who they are. And He knows the first door of entry is the door of *our own* hearts. Are we willing to meet with them? Are we willing to befriend them? Are we willing to help answer their questions? Are we actually willing to pray for them? Pray, not once or twice or for a month, but consistently for them for a year or two or three, until that door opens? Once God knows we’re willing, He can move those in the crowd longing for light to connect with you and me—the Seventh-day Adventist missionaries who cared enough to pray for them.

Ellen White wrote something we must keep uppermost in our minds: “*All over the world* men and women are looking wistfully to heaven. Prayers and tears and inquiries go up from souls longing for light, for grace, for the Holy Spirit. *Many are on the verge of the kingdom*, waiting only to be gathered in.”¹¹ Think about this! All over the world, people are looking for light, and many of them are ready to be gathered to the Adventist Church!

Jesus knew the same thing. After a conversation He had with a Samaritan

woman, leading her to accept Him as the Messiah, she brought a crowd from her city, Sychar, to listen to Jesus (John 4:5–30, 39–41). We must remember that the Jews at that time considered Samaritans backslidden Israelites. They viewed them as having forfeited their chance for salvation. They were considered worse, in fact, than pagans. That’s why the disciples were shocked to see Jesus speaking with a Samaritan woman. At the end of that eventful day, Christ turned to His disciples to share a very profound truth we must also keep in mind: “Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” (John 4:35).

Many more people are ready to respond to God than we can possibly imagine! And they are ready to respond *now*! When we talk of doing evangelism, we often say that very few are interested in our message. That’s what *we* see, not what God sees. God sees an entire field ripe and ready to respond. Prayer will help them come out from the crowd.

Questions for Group Discussion and Personal Reflection

1. Do you think the Adventist Church will ever be able to reach the whole world with the gospel? Why, or why not?
2. Is it reasonable to call for a prayer “revolution” in the church? If so, how much of a “revolution” is needed?
3. How feasible do you think prayer walking is as a ministry plan for the Adventist Church? How about for your local church or Adventist institution?
4. What are your thoughts on Ellen White’s statement that many people are “on the verge of the kingdom, waiting only to be gathered in”?
5. Do you really believe that, in your city or community, the fields “are already white for harvest,” as Jesus said? What makes you think so, one way or the other?

1. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1911), 286.

2. See Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1947), 315.

3. Those four divisions are East-Central Africa, with 27.49 percent of all accessions to the church from 2015 through 2018, Southern Africa-Indian Ocean (19.23 percent), South American (15.82 percent), and Inter-American (14.30 percent), for a total of 76.84 percent of total accessions to the church during said period. The ones struggling the most are the Middle East and

North Africa Union Mission (0.02 percent), the Trans-European (0.18 percent), Euro-Asia (0.18 percent), and Inter-European (0.27 percent) Divisions. The Northern Asia-Pacific Division (1.13 percent) is faring just slightly better. See *2019 Annual Statistical Report, New Series, vol. 1: Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists® 2018 Statistics*, page 4, table 3, accessed August 10, 2020, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2019A.pdf>.

4. See *2019 Annual Statistical Report*, 96.

5. See “World Population,” Worldometer, <https://www.worldometers.info/>, accessed April 27, 2020.

6. See *2019 Annual Statistical Report*, page 4, table 4.

7. Of the real need of Adventism I wrote elsewhere, in *Adventism’s Greatest Need: The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2011). We need the infilling of God’s Spirit as we focus our attention on the goodness and grace of Jesus as our Savior and Lord. What I am speaking about in this book is a *strategic* revolution.

8. At the time of this writing, this was the composition of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division (NSD). Later, China became an attached field of the General Conference.

9. Howard Taylor and Geraldine Taylor, *Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 166.

10. Taylor and Taylor, 166.

11. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 109; emphasis added.