

## **How to Pray for a Missionary**

by Harvey Rodger

Harvey and Ruth Rodger were commended to the Lord's work in Columbia in Colombia in 1973, from assemblies in Rochester, N.Y. After several years there, they now live in Rochester, but with extended visits to Colombia, continuing to assist in the work.

My wife and I knelt on the hard cement floor next to our General Electric double-door refrigerator. It was nearly 100°(F) and perspiration dripped from our noses. The refrigerator would not start.

Chronically low voltage meant that in order to use the washing machine, we had to unplug the refrigerator. There simply wasn't enough to run both at the same time. Usually with the aid of a voltage booster, the refrigerator started right up after its "vacation." Not this time.

I fiddled with the wires leading to the motor. "Maybe there is a loose connection," I thought. I plugged the prongs into the 85-volt socket for what seemed like the 20th time. Whirr, sputter, click, silence.

We had to get it started. The week's food supply depended on it. "Let's pray," I said.

Kneeling on the tiles, holding hands, we prayed, "Lord, you know our need today. We've tried everything and it won't go. Lord, help us. In your name, Amen."

Almost afraid to try, so as not to be embarrassed if it didn't go, we plugged into the connection again.

The sound was beautiful. Our tropical double-door never ran better. Tears mingled with sweat streamed down our faces. We rejoiced in the Lord's goodness that day. We'll never forget it.

Each day missionaries face similar trials. Many are unable to share their needs with those at home. Often they are alone with the Lord, looking to Him only.

Fervent, intelligent prayer should characterize our intercession on behalf of missionaries we know. Daily they confront a variety of opposition from spiritual and inner conflicts to Satanic attacks and physical limitations.

As we pray, we should focus on these key areas:

### Organization

Missionaries often work independently of others with no one supervising their daily schedules. They must be self-starters. Wasted hours can run into days with little accomplished but the basics of living.

### Temptation

The same temptations that each of us wrestles with at home are those the missionaries encounter. Women who are demeaned in a foreign culture view missionaries as kind, gentle, considerate and financially solvent—everything they do not have in their present relationship. It is easy for their admiration to become infatuation and cause problems for the unwary. Meanwhile single men and especially single women on the mission field frequently receive proposals and overtures for friendships from the opposite sex that are difficult to handle. Loneliness and absence of family naturally create a desire for closeness to people.

### Language

Learning a foreign language is usually not an easy task. It is even more difficult for those past twenty. And for one who is articulate in his own language and now must begin with the basics of another, it's a frustrating and humiliating process.

### Compatibility with Other Missionaries

Missionaries tend to be rugged individualists. Some are involved in pioneer works they have founded, seen developed and marvelously blessed. Bring in one with new ideas, or put several together whose methods conflict, and difficulties often arise. The strong determination which has contributed to their success makes it harder to receive input. Conversely, those new to the field and inexperienced in the culture cannot understand why things are done in a certain way.

### Financial Needs

Not having enough funds to live adequately creates pressure in any home. Funds for the work are in addition to everyday needs. Many missionaries are reluctant to discuss finances with family members or elders. They carry this weight alone, asking for God's provision.

### Overwhelming Needs

Ruth and I were summoned to a home where a young lady in her late teens was ill. As we knocked on the door of a little two-room dirt floor shack, her mother told us to go away. The girl begged us to buy her a piece of bread. We insisted on entering and the mother reluctantly pulled the door open. There on a dirty cot lay the most emaciated, sore-covered person we had ever seen. Our hearts were moved as we looked at her.

We took Maria to the hospital. They kept her overnight and then sent her back home to die. The day of her burial, three weeks later after daily nursing care and speaking the name of Jesus to her, Ruth and I were emotionally exhausted. Had we done enough? Could her life have been saved? These were questions that lingered in our minds.

Overwhelming spiritual and physical needs confront missionaries daily. We need to pray for wisdom and discernment in attempting to meet these needs.

### Discouragement

Living in a foreign culture, battling corruption and Satanic opposition, a missionary often exhausts his resources—physical, spiritual, emotional, and financial. Converts who have enormous potential fall by the wayside. Conflicts with missionaries and nationals bring intense discouragement.

A man we knew had been saved for more than five years. His life evidenced new birth in Christ. His leadership capabilities were used in young people's activities and visitation. As a salesman for a large company, he gained even more self-confidence and became widely known and respected because he was a Christian.

But then enormous temptation confronted him. Because of the trust others placed in him, he began borrowing money—with no intent to repay. His embezzlement touched the lives of several missionaries and most tragically overthrew the faith of a new family making a stand for Christ.

How could this happen? Shock, anger, and deep discouragement were a few of the many emotions we experienced.

### Patience

Tropical heat, honking horns, long lines, endless paperwork, and a new language are but a few of the "patience breakers." "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." The Lord has promised to answer our prayers. "Whatever we ask, we receive of His, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."

As missionaries go, witness, teach, make disciples, preach, fight, wrestle, baptize, confirm, exhort, and build up local churches, we need to touch their lives with our fervent prayers. Luke 11:9; I John 3:22.

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