

## IF MY PEOPLE PRAY

This week Southern Baptists are thinking about, praying for and giving to the work of their Home Mission Board. The general theme of the Week of Prayer for Home Missions this year is "If My People ... Pray," which is based upon II Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

To those who attended the two previous services it was pointed out that "If my people pray," then, they will "witness unto all nations," and they will "seek those gone astray." This evening we shall observe that if God's people pray, they will "go everywhere preaching."

The Bible concept of missions is beginning where you are and taking the gospel to every person who is without Christ. Associational, state, home and foreign missions are man-made designations for geographical convenience. All of these are interdependent. Foreign missions provided the impetus which welded Southern Baptists into a denomination in 1845.

World missions is the one purpose of Christians and churches, and challenges those who know the Lord to give their lives and resources. World missions unifies Southern Baptist churches in the one task of making Christ known to the world. Home missions provides the foundation for world missions: churches established, people won to Christ, money given to missions and people answering God's call. These and other basic needs are provided by home missions.

The Cooperative Program gives every person, through his church, an opportunity to support home missionaries whose major purpose is to establish churches. Almost 2,000 home missionaries render numerous ministries to lead people to accept Christ and to develop them into strong Christians.

Through the Cooperative Program, home mission ministries are rendered by Southern Baptist churches in our fifty states, in Panama, in the Canal Zone, in Cuba and Puerto Rico. In this area at least fifty per cent of the people are lost, seventy per cent in some areas. Ninety per cent of twenty million language people are unevangelized. At least twenty-five thousand missions and churches are needed.

Christ said, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth" (Mark 1:38).

The message and spirit of these words of the Master have motivated the Board and its missionaries to increase their efforts in evangelism and church extension.

At the last meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, it was reported that the Home Mission Board had received \$6,410,596 during the previous year. Of this amount \$2,974,070 was received from the Cooperative Program, \$2,553,733 from the Annie Armstrong offering and \$882,793 from other sources.

Of the total appropriations for operations 34.5 per cent was for work in the sixteen southern states and 65.5 per cent was for work entered since 1940. The amount appropriated in the older states was divided as follows:

|                   |       |
|-------------------|-------|
| Language Groups   | 31.3% |
| Mission Centers   | 24.8% |
| National Baptists | 24.8% |

|                        |      |
|------------------------|------|
| Summer Missions        | 7.2% |
| Associational Missions | 5.8% |
| All other work         | 6.2% |

The Board now has cooperative agreements with twenty-three states. The missionaries are supported on a cooperative basis agreed upon by the respective state mission boards and the Home Mission Board. In 1963 special emphasis is being placed on work among the language groups.

The Home Mission Board has various programs of work including the following:

1. Chaplaincy -- Military, Hospital, Institutional and Industrial.
2. Evangelism.
3. Missions.  
The shift from direct to cooperative missions which began in 1959 has strengthened the work of the missionaries. This arrangement exists in twenty-five states.
4. Church loans.  
The Board's available loan resources are inadequate to serve the needs of the churches for financing.
5. Education and Promotion -- Magazines, books, tracts, promotional materials and visuals.

What one sees makes a lot of difference in what he does. Christ looked upon the wicked city of Jerusalem and wept over it. John Knox looked upon his beloved native land and cried out, "Give me Scoutland or I die." What they saw made a lot of difference.

Hundreds saw the privation and suffering of the people of Labrador but it remained for Grenfell to forsake the ease and comforts of England in order to minister to those needy people. Those who chose the comforts are forgotten, but the memory of Grenfell is a benediction to all who know of his sacrificial work.

The priest and the Levite saw the wounded man in the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, but they passed him by. Only the Samaritan stopped to minister to the man in his need.

Every person of every race and every nation needs the Saviour just as much as we need Him. Over seventy-five million in the United States are unchurched. Of the nearly three million Spanish-speaking people here less than ten per cent are Christians. Of the six million plus who belong to the forty-six races and nationalities in our convention territory, only one out of each one hundred has accepted Christ as a personal Saviour.

The little Chinese lady, who received Christ as her Saviour, expressed the sentiment of these from other lands when she said, "I always knew there ought to be a person like that."

Look at the Indians from whom white men took the land of America. There are more than a quarter of a million of them in Southern Baptist territory. Despite the fact that white men have been living in their midst through these many years, hundreds and hundreds of them have never heard a gospel sermon. However, Home Board missionaries are working among them in nine states.

Dr. Courts Redford said that he and Brother Wiley Henton were going out to Copper Mine to see about establishing a mission in that isolated trading post in the Navajo Reservation. Just before they reached Copper Mine, they met an old Indian who could speak English. He inquired, "Are you going to start a Christian Mission here?" Dr. Redford told him that they hoped to do so. He said, "If you don't hurry, it will be too late for some of us." Can't you see the urgency of this task?

Between a fifth and a fourth of Americans move to another address annually. Over two million of these migrants live in trailers. Dr. Redford told about a lad from a migrant family in the cotton fields of Southeast Missouri a few years ago, to whom he tried to explain the plan of salvation, and the fact that Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. The lad replied, "He'll have a hard time finding us, we move too often." The fact that eighty per cent of these migratory workers are without church membership indicates that Christ has a hard time finding them.

Our prayers, our words of encouragement and our gifts greatly help those who are working on the mission fields. A part of what they accomplish will most surely be marked to the account of those of us who support them. No wonder Christ admonished, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through and steal."

People of our country need to turn to God. So many of our people have ignored God and thought they could get along without Him. Now conditions are developing which are most undesirable, but human wisdom is unable to remedy them. The fact is we just can't get along as we should without God. God's children need to come back to Him and live in accordance with His expressed will. What a pity that spiritual zest and enthusiasm have gone out of the lives of so many! When they are asked to accept some responsible place of service in the church, they beg to be excused. They are too anemic spiritually to accept an office, to teach a class or to win a soul to Christ. Dr. Vance Havner described their conduct in these words: "They go to a ball game and yell like a Comanche Indian and come to church and sit like a wooden Indian."

The prescription for our present-day ills is set forth in II Chronicles 7:14:

1. Humility before God.

If any people would have God's help and enjoy His blessings, they must humble themselves before Him, both individually and collectively.

2. Believing prayer.

God cannot work in and through prayerless people. When we try to do things without relying upon God for strength we deprive ourselves of our blessings.

3. Persevering supplication.

Don't try to get along without God. Seek His face daily.

4. Personal reformation.

Since there is so little in the sinful lives of many professing Christians to appeal to the un-saved, they must turn from their wicked ways and come back to God, or they need not expect the unbelievers to trust Christ for salvation.

God's promise to hear, to forgive and to heal is conditioned on our humility, prayer, supplication and reformation. Just as certainly as we do our duty in these realms God will give us an indescribable joy, richly bless our efforts for Him and save lost sinners.