

Preparing Prayer Letters

Introduction

Some of the things we will discuss may not be totally new to you. But my prayer is that they will give fresh incentive to write good prayer letters (or emails) to your prayer partners.

You need to write prayer letters if you want to see God's work happen through you – if you believe in prayer. Your work will in a very significant way be dependent upon the prayer backing that you have and that will be dependent upon how you keep your prayer partners informed.

This is a part of your responsibility as a missionary – whether you like it or not. If people give and pray, our part is to keep them adequately informed.

Don't let it become a burden. Some people set themselves a goal to write a personal note or letter to everyone who writes to them. That is a very high and idealistic goal and wearies one after a while. And furthermore, such robs us of important time we should be using in ministry to people on the field – rather than just keeping up with your friends back home.

Remember that there are different kinds of people standing with you:

- * The wider circle (churches, youth groups, friends etc. – to these you can write a few times a year as they are interested in a general way in you and in what you are doing)
- * The inner circle (some who have committed themselves to praying for you consistently, some everyday – to these you need to write more regularly as they will need more up to date information and prayer news from you)
- * The innermost circle (a few who know you very well – to these you will write personal notes in which you express the deeper issues and struggles).

Write with a view to minister to people – to bless and encourage them in their walk with God, not just thinking of your getting their money or their prayer support.

Make your prayer letters a matter of prayer.

Twelve Key Words about Missionary Prayer Letters

REGULAR: frequent, not occasional, whenever you feel like it; planned; if you write only very occasionally, then people soon lose interest in praying and perhaps also in giving.

PERSONAL: be yourself; write from the heart, sincere, not put-on – as if you were writing to one person; try to put yourself in their shoes – remember how it is back home and what things they can understand.

HONEST: not trying to paint only a glowing picture to impress people; telling it as it is; real people respond best to real people; not preachy as if you have suddenly become a spiritual giant

POSITIVE: don't just have prayer points; also encourage people with praise points – telling them how their prayers have been answered; write encouraging letters that people will enjoy reading and be blessed by.

BRIEF: max. 2 pages; too many words (especially for general prayer group) will dull people's interest in reading your letters; you don't have to write long epistles now that you are a missionary.

ATTRACTIVE: layout is important; first impressions stick; be creative; however, don't try to mimic others; be yourself; or let someone back home do the layout for you; don't have long paragraphs or long sentences. Crisp, lively speech – that is easy to read.

THANKFUL: express thanks frequently and generously for people's prayers and gifts as well as their notes of encouragement; even if you wonder if people are praying for you, assume they are – more are than you will know about.

INFORMATIVE: interest them with more information than just a long list of prayer points; tell them stories about people (nationals & missionaries); give them some information about the country; clear, specific prayer points versus vague, general information.

RELEVANT: up to date; both what has happened but also what is ahead (and keep in mind when they will be receiving and reading the letters so that they have the prayer points ahead of when certain events will take place).

USER-FRIENDLY: prepare your letter in such a way that it can be used for praying, not just for reading and then laying aside; eg summarise main prayer points, underline, put in bold, change the font etc. Make the prayer points stand out.

INCLUSIVE: be big-hearted; not just about you but also about your team's ministry, about the ministries of the national church, about OM etc. Use your prayer letters to expand the world vision of your readers rather than just telling them about "you and your work".

CONNECTED: follow-up in the next letter what you have written about in previous prayer letters; if you asked them to pray for something, then tell them how God answered your prayer; if there isn't yet an answer, then don't hesitate to tell them you still need their prayers.

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