

PRAYER REQUEST DENIED!

(Taken from the book *The Forgotten Ways*, by Alan Hirsch)

In 2005, Michael Frost was privileged to meet with three Chinese leaders from the Underground Church. They had been smuggled to a discreet area where they met with church leaders from the West.

- Their first prayer request involved their desire to have large congregations. While government restrictions had been somewhat relaxed, they were still forbidden to have over 15 people in a single group. When the church numbered 15, they had to start another group. Could the Westerners please pray about that.
- Prayer request number two was to have church buildings. Their church buildings had all been confiscated or destroyed, and they were forced to meet in homes, cafes, karaoke bars, and social clubs. Could the Westerners please pray that the government would allow them to again build church buildings.
- Request number three involved the building of seminaries. Since preacher training institutions were forbidden, the responsibility for training preachers was forced upon the local church.

Alan then wrote: ***“Michael, himself a vice-president of a seminary, has often said that in all good conscience he simply could not pray for them in this way, because he and the group gathered there realized that in many ways the Communist state was forcing the church to be more true to itself”.***

Then, he added the testimony of Philip Yancey. After his own life changing trip to China he wrote: *“Before going to China I met with one of the missionaries who had been expelled in 1950. ‘We felt so sorry for the church we left behind,’ he said. ‘They had no one to teach them, no printing presses; no seminaries, no one to run their clinics and orphanages. No resources, really, except the Holy Spirit’. Yancey wryly concludes, “it appears the Holy Spirit is doing just fine”*

Illustrative of those leaders in the Chinese church is a small, bent, and soft spoken man affectionately called “Uncle L”. He has no degrees, no “office”, no central institution, and no title, yet he is recognized as a leader by three million Chinese Christians. He has been imprisoned and suffered much for his faith.

Then there is forty-four year old Brother Shi. As a teenager he headed up his province’s Communist Youth League and later served as a Red Guard. When he became a Christian, he was kicked out of his home and the authorities attempted to hunt him down. Without an official staff or sophisticated organization he now supervises 260,000 Christians in his province.

Hirsch illustrates the power of each one winning one, by relating the story of the man who invented the game of chess. The King of India determined to reward him with one free wish. The wise inventor asked for what initially seemed to be a rather modest request. He asked for one grain of rice to be placed on the first square of the chess board. Then for the rice to be doubled on every other square of the chess board. Since there are 64 squares on the chess board, this would be 2 raised to the 63rd power. This would be 2,2213,372,036,000,000,000 kernels, or 153 billion tons of rice - more than the world can harvest for the next 1,000 years.

I think all of us have asked for things that we would be better off without. Some have suggested that the Chinese church is the purest and most evangelistic, and the most numerous church on earth. Most of us, however, are not willing to pay the price for such success. Hirsch believes that the greatest threat to the church in America is not our fascination with Oriental religion, New Age heresy, or even radical Islam. He believes our problem is *consumerism*. Jesus said that all who wanted to be His disciples would have to deny themselves and take up their cross on a daily basis. When we shop for a cross and pray for one that is inexpensive and comfortable, our loving Heavenly Father will probably answer us in the same way that Michael Frost answered those leaders in the Chinese Church. *“In all good conscience, he simply could not pray for them in this way”.*