

# The Single Missionary

by

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# Publisher's Statement

We have printed many mission books, some being *stories of works* and others being *studies of methods*. This study by Kevin Moore has grown out of his own experiences as a single missionary, and his realization of the need for young men and women to prepare themselves through the experiences of others.

There are many opportunities for young people to become acquainted with missionaries and their work as those soldiers of the field visit local congregations to tell their story. Students who are attending a Christian College or University will have numerous opportunities to join fellow students on mission trips to all parts of the world. With such experiences, coupled with mission classes in studies such as this book, prospective young missionaries — both men and women — will be able to prepare themselves to go alone to some field, or to join a team that is going.

Kevin discusses a wide range of topics for young men and women to consider if they desire to be missionaries. Some of these include choosing the country, language, whether to work alone or with others, sponsor, support, health, passports, visas, relationships, and the methods to be used. It is hoped that this study will be a source of help and encouragement to people who are looking for answers.

Kevin, I treasure your friendship as a fellow missionary and I am honored to publish your book.

J. C. Choate  
Winona, MS  
February 15, 2002

# Dedication

This book is dedicated to my Christian parents, **Glenn E.** and **Nancy Stewart Moore**, without whom my life would have no doubt taken a much different course. Dad, having faithfully preached the gospel for many years, never saw me return from the mission field, but I'm thankful he saw me go. Although Mama wasn't thrilled with the idea of her "baby boy" moving so far from home, she has encouraged me in so many ways, including the fact that she has never tried to discourage me from doing what God has called me to do.

# Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge the churches and individuals who have believed in me and supported me, even while I was young, inexperienced, and single. There is no way I will be able to specifically mention all who have contributed to my life and work over the years, and I humbly apologize to those whom I fail to mention by name. I am, however, compelled to name a few.

I want to thank **Earl Edwards** for igniting a missionary passion within me, **Rod** and **Brenda Rutherford** for fanning the flame, **Ronald** and **Rose Coleman** for introducing me to New Zealand, and **Rod Kyle** for helping me get my feet on the ground.

**Jerry Dan** and **Linda Darnall** have financially supported my work like no other individuals. **Earl Finnell** has prayed for me every day since I moved overseas. While many have supported me through encouraging letters, none more than **Lynne Hibbett**, who, incidentally, eventually became my wife (though she wants it made clear that this was not her motivation for writing!).

The **Central church of Christ in Cleveland, Tennessee** has proficiently overseen, sponsored and supported my work from the beginning, and without their help my efforts would have been much more inept. I especially want to thank **Charlie Cantrell** for his invaluable guidance and assistance and his good work as an elder and missions correspondent. **J. Marvin Hutson** has done my income tax returns free of charge over the years, for which I will always be grateful. The following congregations

have also been generous and faithful in their support: **Glendale** in Newbern, TN, **West Dyersburg**, TN, **Cross Roads** in Bells, TN, **Hornbeak**, TN, **Highland** in Columbia, TN, **Ault Road** in Knoxville, TN, Central in **Sweetwater**, TN, **Lebanon**, VA, and **Green Valley** in Noblesville, IN. Other congregations who later joined the work include the following: **Estes** in Henderson, TN, **Crieve Hall** in Nashville, TN, **Red Bank** in Chattanooga, TN, **Bells**, TN, **Parsons**, TN, and **Wood Ave.** in Florence, AL.

# Preface

Although I am no longer single, for the first thirty-four years of my life and for the first seven years of my missionary career, I was. It's not that I necessarily wanted to be a single missionary, or that I even wanted to be single. But I had a burning desire to do missionary work, and I just happened to be single at the time. I dreamed of having a wife and a family someday, but that was never my main goal in life. There was no question that if I put God first in every decision I made, no matter where that led or in what situation that left me, everything would work out for the best. Consequently my life has been blessed beyond anything I could have imagined. I am thankful to now be a husband and a father, and I certainly believe in marriage, especially my own. But I also thank God for those years I was privileged to serve as a single missionary.

Like all other modern-day writers who use the English language, I have had to wrestle with the pronoun issue. It would no doubt be more politically correct and alienate fewer readers to use "he or she," "he/she" or "s/he" throughout the book, but this can be quite tedious and cumbersome. Another option is to use all plural (generic) pronouns or to use no pronouns at all, but obviously this is not very realistic. While some of these options will be utilized from time to time, mostly the simple, old-fashioned approach of using masculine pronouns is taken. Although this book is written from the perspective of a single male missionary, it is written about and for the single, the missionary, and the single missionary. It is my prayer that it will find relevance

for all unmarried Christians (whether missionaries or not), for all prospective and current missionaries (whether male or female, single or not), and for all who support missionary efforts.

Another pronoun issue is whether or not pronouns ought to begin with a capital letter when referring to deity. There is no problem when the pronoun is used for the Godhead in general or for God the Father or the Holy Spirit in particular. There is no problem when it applies to Jesus Christ in a context in which the divine nature of Christ is highlighted. However, in several passages of scripture (e.g. Hebrews 2:11-18) the human nature of Jesus is the focus, and when the inspired writer is seeking to stress this point (where “he” or “him” would be more appropriate), it makes me uncomfortable redirecting that focus by using “He” or “Him.” The deity of Christ must never be de-emphasized, but neither should his humanity. Since there is no distinction in the Greek NT between pronouns used for deity and those used for men, and it is grammatically correct in English to use lower case pronouns for God (unless the reference is ambiguous), and the reader understands that the use of such in no way exhibits a lack of reverence for the Divine Nature, in this book lower case pronouns will be consistently used, except in quotes (e.g. NKJV) where capital letters are used.

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



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# Chapter 1

## The Case for the Single Missionary

People are single for various reasons, whether widowed, divorced, or never married. Many are simply waiting to find that special someone with whom they are willing to spend a lifetime, while others actually choose to remain unmarried. In almost every congregation of the Lord's church, single Christians can be found in each of these categories.

Contrary to what many seem to believe, single-hood is not a disease. Yet the prevailing attitude appears to be that the unmarried status is undesirable, and the older a single person gets, the more stigmatized he or she becomes. How often are single people put into those uncomfortable match-making situations by well-intentioned friends who believe that being happy, fulfilled, and complete are not possible without a companion? Why would it seem so peculiar for a congregation to have a greater preference for an unmarried preacher than for a family man? Why is it generally more difficult for single missionaries to raise support than for married ones? When mission teams are being formed, why are couples often recruited with little regard for single prospects? The underlying message, although subtle and unintentional, is that the unmarried status is comparatively inferior. Consequently singles are unwittingly brainwashed into thinking they are abnor-

mal, and no wonder so many are discontent and undergo senseless frustration and self-pity.

Is there something inherently wrong with being spouseless? Was not Jesus, our Master and perfect example, a single man? What about Jeremiah, Daniel, and Paul? There is no mention in the Bible of the following individuals having been married: Ezra, Nehemiah, Mordecai, John the immerser, Mary Magdalene, Lazarus and his sisters, Stephen, Barnabas, Silas, John Mark, Timothy, Phoebe, Titus, Apollos, and many more. Others, such as Ezekiel, Hosea, Naomi, Ruth, Jesus' mother, Mark's mother, Lydia and more, became (or at least appear to have become) "single again" after marriage. Being unmarried, therefore, is not only acceptable, in some cases it may even be preferable (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:7-8).

When are we going to learn that happiness is not dependent on one's marital status? If you think that matrimony is the secret to happiness, look around at how many unhappy married couples there are and be sobered by the alarming divorce rate! Do you expect to be happy in heaven? Since there is no marriage in heaven (Mark 12:25), where is that happiness going to come from? If you are a discontented person before marriage, chances are you will be discontent afterwards. True joy comes from within, regardless of external circumstances. It is far better to learn to be happy as a single person than to rush into wedlock and end up miserably disappointed or broken-hearted. A single man once wrote, "*I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content*" (Philippians 4:11). Accept your circumstance in life, learn to be content, and use your unique situation to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 7:24; 10:31). Even if your marital status happens to change, your contentment and usefulness to God should not.

Being single must never be considered an impediment. In recent years the “singles ministry” has developed and is becoming increasingly more popular. While the concept is noble and it may serve a useful purpose, in my humble opinion it has generally been misdirected. Single people are not a special class of needy individuals in the church to be pitied, ministered unto, or entertained. It is true that there are some singles, such as widows, who do have special needs and ought to be cared for (James 1:27), but the mere fact of singleness does not automatically render a person “needy” or eliminate that person’s own responsibility to serve others (1 Timothy 5:3-16). Singles ought to be seen as a dynamic force in the Lord’s body to be appreciated and utilized. Wouldn’t it be great if “singles ministry” meant getting more unmarried Christians involved in ministering to the needs of others?’

Almost all successful missionary models are based on the ministries and methods of Jesus and Paul, both of whom, incidentally, were bachelors. There appears to be greater precedent in the New Testament for single missionaries than for married ones, but in today’s church it looks as though we have turned this idea on its head. Congregations looking to support a missionary usually have in mind a *couple* or a *family*, and it seems that single candidates are considered only when no others are available. I can’t help but wonder how difficult it would be for evangelists like Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, and even Jesus to find employment or to raise financial support in many present-day churches of Christ.

Don’t ever let the fact that you are single keep you from considering missionary opportunities. We need more singles involved in every aspect of church work, especially missions. If

you are eligible, you most certainly have the “*right to take along a believing [spouse]*” (1 Corinthians 9:5). But keep in mind that you also have the right *not to!* Regardless of social expectations, the Lord has not made it a requirement for you to be married. If your heart is set on doing missionary work, it is much better to remain single than to marry someone who doesn’t share your convictions and dreams. I know brethren who sincerely want to do overseas missionary work but have never been able to because of a spouse who does not have the same desire. The fire in their bones either has to be extinguished or it continues to burn with feeble attempts to satisfy it on the home front. And if you drag an uncommitted partner off to the mission field, don’t expect your work to be very fruitful. If your mate is miserable, you will almost certainly be miserable too. A number of missionaries have been forced to return home prematurely because of an unhappy spouse.

Several years ago, as we were discussing my single status, an elder of one of my supporting congregations said to me: “There’s nothing better than a good woman . . .” After a brief pause, he continued, “. . . and there’s nothing worse than a bad one!” (cf. Proverbs 12:4). That is not to suggest a person is bad if he or she doesn’t want to be a missionary, and the above observation also applies to the opposite gender. But the point I’m trying to make is this — marriage is not a prerequisite for missionary work, and in some cases it may even be inadvisable. There are two things a prospective single missionary must never say: (1) “I plan to do missionary work *unless* I get married”; and (2) “I won’t do missionary work *until* I get married.” There are some who have chosen single-hood (at least for a time) for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. “*He who is able to accept it, let him accept it*” (Matthew 19:12).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>In Paul's writings, he "has no conception of a distinction between functioning and nonfunctioning members, between those who minister to and those who are only ministered to . . . . In short, when ministry is limited to the few the result is a grotesque parody of the body, a body eighty or ninety percent paralyzed, with only the few organs functioning, and functioning to little effect, since the effectiveness of the body depends on its diversity functioning in unity" (James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 560).

<sup>2</sup>I personally know several people who have made statements like this, and despite their sincerity and good intentions at the time, they have allowed other things to overshadow their initial desire to do missionary work. "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*" (Matthew 6:33).

## Chapter 2

# Called to be a Missionary

How do you know whether or not you ought to pursue a career in missions? Have you been “called” to be a missionary? To be among “the called” (Romans 1:6) means to have been called out of darkness (1 Peter 2:9) into the fellowship of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9). This “call” comes by way of the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14), which is God’s invitation to the world to be reconciled to himself through Jesus. All who respond in obedient faith are “called in one body” (Colossians 3:15) and “in one hope” (Ephesians 4:4). But does this “holy calling” (2 Timothy 1:9) offer benefits without responsibilities? No matter how many times I read 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, it continues to say the same thing. If I am a new creation in Christ,<sup>1</sup> then both privileges **and** responsibilities have been granted by God: “who has reconciled us to Himself **and** [*in addition*] has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” This ministry, which ensures that others have a chance to be reconciled to God, has not been given only to first-century apostles (Matthew 28:18-20) or merely to full-time paid evangelists (Acts 8:4), but to all who have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> In a sense, therefore, every Christian is called to be a missionary.<sup>3</sup> The two-fold question is, how and where does one fulfill this ministry?

The body of Christ is of course comprised of individual members, each having particular talents, functions, and consequent responsibilities, contributing to the integrated work of the

entire church (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). While preaching the gospel is the task of the whole body, both proclaimers and supporters, goers and senders are necessary (Romans 10:14-15; 12:4-8). This is not to say that if I put a dollar in the collection basket each week I have sufficiently fulfilled my Christian duty. While we can never repay the Lord for his manifold blessings, surely eternal life is worth more than a dollar a week! God does not simply want the meager leftovers of my paycheck but desires that I first give *myself* to him (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:5). What every called/reconciled individual must solemnly evaluate is: am I doing everything within my God-given capabilities to fulfill my God-given ministry of reconciliation?<sup>4</sup>

Another important consideration is “where” this ministry is to be fulfilled. The obvious answer is **wherever** you happen to be (Acts 11:19-20; 2 Corinthians 4:7). But since the gospel is needed everywhere, it is not simply a matter of where you are needed. Although this will be qualified in a subsequent chapter, you should start thinking about where you might be needed **the most**. Surely more Christian doctors, social workers, teachers, farmers, factory workers, businessmen, and preachers are needed in Hometown, USA. Wherever there are committed Christians faithfully serving the Lord, let us be thankful. But consider the fact that the United States comprises only about six percent of the world’s population, yet approximately 95 percent of the gospel preachers are laboring in this country. The sobering question is, who is going to help give the rest of the world (94%) an opportunity to go to heaven?<sup>5</sup> Are you among the vast majority saying, “Let someone else do it”? Please be aware that there is no “someone else” when it comes to fulfilling your own personal Christian duty. *“Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it”* (Colossians 4:17).



But how do I know whether or not I am capable of doing missionary work (in its customarily understood sense)? Granted, we all have different abilities and not everyone is cut out to do the work of a missionary. Precious resources can be wasted and much damage caused by the wrong kind of people going to the mission field. I can't help but wonder, though, how so many Christians seem so sure they are not cut out to be missionaries when so few have even attempted it! I have a suspicious feeling that many more could be doing effective missionary work than are currently trying.

How, then, do I go about ascertaining what the Lord's will is for my life? Since God *"has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us..."* (2 Peter 1:3), we can know, generally, what the divine will is. As a matter of fact, the will of God is something we must *understand* and *obey* (Ephesians 5:17; Matthew 7:21). But what about the particular things in one's life that are not specifically addressed in the Bible? For example, where does the Lord want me, as an individual disciple, to "go" in order to share my faith? I can't be everywhere at once. How can I be sure that I'm presently where God wants me to be? Moreover, how can I determine whether God wants me to get into full-time ministry or to seek secular employment, and which of the multiple options in either category is right for me? Is it possible to know what the Lord's providential will is?

*"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose"* (Romans 8:28). While we can have assurance that God providentially works in our lives, we cannot always know for sure the particulars of his providential will.<sup>6</sup> As a matter of fact,

it is probably best that we don't know. God has created each one of us as a free moral agent with the ability to think and the freedom to choose. Yet we often take this for granted and forget what a tremendous blessing it is. Admittedly, being entrusted with responsibility is not always easy. We sometimes want to say to God: "Tell me what to do," "Show me a sign," "Don't let me make the wrong decision." Now the Lord certainly wants us to trust in, rely on, and obey him, but surely he does not want his children to be a bunch of helpless, indolent, senseless robots. If we are going to make a difference in this world, it is imperative that we develop into mature, responsible beings. And this is only possible when we have opportunities to make our own decisions, and even our own mistakes, and to learn and grow from them.

We most often struggle with this when we naively think there is only one choice that can be "the right one." What career is *the right one* for me? Will I ever find that special someone who is *the right one*? Which mission field is *the right one* to choose? While preference, personality, compatibility, and other personal traits play an important part, more often than not our "best" choices extend far beyond a single option. As we travel down the road of life, we regularly come to forks in the road. Often there are several paths leading off the fork and we must decide which one to take. Equipped with a good understanding of God's word, we can make wise, responsible choices. No matter which direction we decide to travel, as long as it is consistent with God's overall will, and even if it turns out to be rough and bumpy, God will ensure that it works out for the best. Moreover, other forks lie ahead that will enable us to change our course if necessary.

In preparing for their second missionary tour, Paul and Barnabas had a decision to make — to take John Mark or not (Acts 15:36-41). God did not tell them what to do, and they

ended up making opposite choices. Which one was right? Later Paul realized that his estimation of John Mark may not have been totally accurate (2 Timothy 4:11), but that is not to say he made the wrong decision. Two missionary teams going to two mission fields doing twice as much missionary work surely demonstrates that neither decision was wrong. The Lord allowed Paul and Barnabas to make their own choices, then he made sure that both decisions worked together for good.

Now back to the question: to be a missionary or not to be a missionary? I was told in preaching school, “If you can do something other than preach, do it.” The point is that you should only be a preacher if your conscience will not allow you to do anything else.<sup>7</sup> The same is true of missionaries. It is not a matter of prestige, adventure, love of travel, guilt, or any other questionable motive. The bottom line is whether or not you can be comfortable doing something else. But if you carry in your heart the burden of a lost world and you have a fire burning in your bones and you can’t rest knowing that you have an untold message that has the power to save souls, then your choice ought to be clear. Paul expressed it this way: “. . . *compulsion presses hard upon me; yes, woe is to me, if I do not proclaim the gospel*” (1 Corinthians 9:16, McCord).

The desire to be a missionary, however, is not the only consideration. There may be some who have the aspiration but lack the fundamental people-skills, adaptability, tenacity, or other qualities necessary to be an effective missionary.<sup>8</sup> While at least some of these traits can (and should) be developed, until then those who lack them may be better suited for other areas of service. An ill-equipped missionary can sometimes do more harm than good.

How, then, do I determine whether or not I am suitable for the challenge and how do I go about identifying and eliminating any possible inadequacies? The best place to start is where you are right now. Get involved in the work of your local congregation, which usually requires more than just waiting to be asked. Be evangelistic — share the gospel with the unsaved people in your life right now. Take advantage of campaign opportunities, both local and abroad. Read books and articles about missionaries and missionary work. Correspond with or talk to current and former missionaries. Most Christian universities and some other church-affiliated schools offer courses in missions, cultural anthropology and evangelism, and some even have missionary apprenticeship programs.<sup>9</sup> Above all, be a diligent student of God’s word. Good personal study habits are indispensable. You may even consider attending a tuition-free preacher training school to enhance your study skills and increase your Bible knowledge.

While much experience can be gained by serving the Lord at home, to a large degree the only way to fully prepare for foreign missionary work is to actually do it. There are some things you just can’t learn from a book or in an unrelated environment. No matter how prepared you think you are or you think you need to be, most of your learning, growing, and maturity will develop on the mission field. There comes a time when you must step out in faith, take your tiny seeds of knowledge and limited experience, and venture into the exciting, challenging, faith-building world of cross-cultural evangelism. *“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me’.”* (Isaiah 6:8).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>As a penitent believer having been baptized into Christ, for the remission of sins, to walk in newness of life (Acts 2:37-38; Romans 6:3-5).

<sup>2</sup>Consider also the universal priesthood of believers (1 Peter 2:1-10). If you have tasted that the Lord is gracious (v. 3), as part of his family or “holy priesthood” you have the privilege of offering up spiritual sacrifices through Christ (v. 5) and the responsibility to “*proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*” (v. 9).

<sup>3</sup>The English word “missionary” is derived from the Latin term *mittere*, meaning “to let go, send.” While its nearest counterpart in the NT is *apostolos* (apostle, messenger), the word “missionary” itself is not a biblical term and is therefore hard to define biblically. We customarily use the term to describe someone who has been sent out by a congregation or group of congregations, usually to a foreign country, to preach the gospel. But if every disciple has been “sent” by God to proclaim the divine message (Matthew 28:18-20), it is appropriate to use this term in a more general sense. David Hesselgrave remarks: “We are *all* ‘missionaries’! It is only a matter of degree and direction! And the more one is persuaded himself, the more intent he becomes, and the greater the barriers he is willing to cross in order [to] influence others” (*Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, p. 88). However, having made the point, the word “missionary” will be used in its customary sense throughout the remainder of this book. It is not my intention to lessen the importance of the foreign missionary’s role, and obviously this word cannot be applied, even in a general sense, to a Christian who neglects this ministry.

“Our mission: go, preach, make disciples, baptize, teach, seek and save ... has usually been understood in a *collective* sense; something we do *together*. But, if the corporate body ever does anything, it will be a matter of *individual* commitment to it. . . . Only when I understand, as an individual, I personally must go into the world, will the feats of our ancient brethren be equaled or exceeded” (Dwight Whitsett, *The Urgent Revolution*, pp. 120, 122).

<sup>4</sup>Dr. Earl Edwards pricked my heart with this statistic in 1983 as I sat in his *World Evangelism* class at Freed-Hardeman College. He revealed that only 5% of the gospel preachers are attempting to reach 94% of the world! It was then that I made the decision to be an overseas missionary. But in all fairness, this

statistic needs to be amended. Since 1983 the number of foreign missionaries supported by churches of Christ has gradually increased. In 1994 Gaston Tarbet (unpublished "World Survey"), counting husbands and wives separately, estimated a total of 1,019 overseas missionaries, more than doubling the number approximated 15 years earlier. Of course, missionaries regularly come and go, so it is difficult to maintain very accurate statistics. Another factor, which seems to have been omitted from the above figures, is the number of "national preachers" (not to mention other dedicated Christians) in the various mission fields around the world. Nevertheless, the number of missionaries being sent out by North American churches of Christ is still a fraction of what it ought to be. There is approximately one overseas missionary for every 1,232 members of the church in the United States and about 109 countries where neither a local nor a foreign evangelist is represented among churches of Christ (cf. Earl Edwards, "Churches of Christ in the 20th Century: in the U.S. and Around the World" in *The Voice of Truth International*, Vol. 24, pp. 102-110).

\*Illustrated by Mordecai's words, "who knows?" (Esther 4:14), and Paul's, "perhaps" (Philemon 15).

\*Batsell Barrett Baxter concluded that one may assume he is "called to preach" when his "natural qualifications are such as are needed by the minister, when he feels certain that God desires him as a public proclaimer of the gospel, and when he himself desires to preach to such a degree that he could never be quite conscience-free should he decline the opportunity to preach" (*The Heart of the Yale Lectures*, pp. 6-7).

\*The following personal qualities of an effective proclaimer of the gospel have been suggested by Stafford North: (1) a sense of burden, (2) sincerity, (3) enthusiasm, (4) humility, (5) meekness, (6) patience, (7) purity, (8) intellectual competence, (9) good health, and (10) leadership (*Preaching Man & Method*, pp. 30-39).

\*There are also student groups, such as Freed-Hardeman's Evangelism Forum and Missions Group, which are extremely beneficial for mission-minded students. For additional information about preparing for missionary work, see Daniel C. Hardin's "Preparation for Missions" in *Guidelines for World Evangelism*, ed. George Gurganus, pp. 227-47.

# Chapter 3

## Putting the Single Missionary into Perspective

Many people have a distorted view of the kind of person it takes to be a missionary. “If I don’t fit the stereotype,” some opine, “then I’m excused.” In his book *The Eldership and the Missionary*, Howard Norton satirically writes:

Myth has it that missionaries are spiritual supermen. They are not ordinary mortals like the lawyer, the physician, or the businessman. These religious giants are unselfish, untiring, unconquerable advocates of the truth. They are forever enthusiastic, courageous, self-sacrificing, and free of all materialistic ambition. They can say goodbye to loved ones without so much as a quiver, feel no pangs that friends in the homeland soon forget their names and eventually their persons, and sense no grief when the mailbox is empty week after week. They are above temptations faced by the rest of mankind and find their greatest joy in suffering. They are never discouraged, never depressed, never dismayed. Missionaries, according to myth, are a special, superhuman breed too committed to need exhortation and too strong to

require strengthening. . . . How vast the gulf between myth and truth! (p. 68)<sup>1</sup>

The apostle Paul did not “fit the bill” in a lot of ways. He was not exceptionally smart, talented, eloquent, impressive, or brave (1 Corinthians 2:1-3; 2 Corinthians 10:10). He wasn’t married either. Paul even had a humbling physical malady that would have kept a lesser person down (2 Corinthians 12:5-10). But what made Paul such a qualified and successful missionary was the simple fact that he carried in his heart the burden of a lost world (Romans 1:14). He was simply a forgiven sinner who wanted to share the joy and peace of Christ with those who had not yet had the opportunity to hear (Romans 10:14-15; 1 Corinthians 9:16-22; 15:9-10). If you are a forgiven sinner and that burden rests in your heart, in a sense you are already a missionary.<sup>2</sup> Now you must decide what you are going to do about it and where you are going to do it. Those who never accomplish anything worthwhile are those who never attempt anything worthwhile. But with God’s help, you can do anything you set your mind to do (Philippians 4:13).

Believe it or not, single-hood can actually be advantageous in missionary work. No matter who you are (married or unmarried, young or old, male or female) there are always advantages and disadvantages to being in your particular situation. It is a mistake, therefore, even self-destructive, to highlight the disadvantages and use them as excuses (cf. Matthew 25:14-30). Never consider your singleness to be a hindrance in your service to God.

### **Advantages of the Single Missionary**

In the seventh chapter of 1 Corinthians Paul argues that the unmarried state is preferable, at least in particular circumstances.



In verses 26-28 he mentions “the present distress.” During times of hardship, an unmarried person will often have a less difficult time coping than someone who has family obligations. A husband is responsible for the well being of his wife, and if children are involved the responsibility is even greater. Generally, singles have the advantage during times of civil unrest, persecution, economic hardship, financial crisis, and so on. There may be some countries to which a single missionary is willing to go where health or safety risks would understandably deter a young family.

Paul goes on to explain in 1 Corinthians 7:32-35 that unmarried Christians ordinarily have more time and opportunities to do God’s work. Married Christians can undoubtedly accomplish much in the Lord’s service, but part of their responsibility to the Lord is taking care of the needs of their spouses and children. A single person, on the other hand, is usually free from these family duties and can therefore devote more time and effort to prayer, Bible study, benevolence, evangelism, and other aspects of the Lord’s work. A single Christian does not have the same or as many distractions as those who are married. Some have likened this to being married to Christ and rendering complete devotion and service to him. That is why disciples like Paul were able to dedicate so much of their energies to the Lord’s cause and be so productive.

There is also a financial advantage to being single. Without a family to support, less funds are needed for housing, food, clothing, and other living expenses. It is much cheaper to travel, especially overseas, which is a real benefit for present-day missionary work. Moving costs tend to be considerably lower as well. Congregations should consider how financially expedient it is to support single missionaries.

A single person can sometimes be more adaptable to poorer living conditions. When necessary he can spend longer periods of time on distant evangelistic trips and not worry about leaving behind and neglecting a family. It goes without saying that unmarried Christians are usually in a better position to influence, evangelize, and minister to the needs of other unmarried people. The example of a faithful single Christian can be a tremendous encouragement to those who might be struggling with the temptations and frustrations associated with single-hood.

### **Disadvantages of the Single Missionary**

In all fairness, the other side of the proverbial coin needs to be examined as well. Admittedly there are times when it is not necessarily advantageous to be single. Much of this, however, is simply based on the misguided judgment of others. As has already been suggested, the evaluation of many seems to be that, all else being equal, a single missionary is not as qualified as a married one. Regardless of whether or not this appraisal is fair or biblical, it is reality. That being the case, it is often more difficult for a single missionary to raise support. In many cultures around the world, having a spouse and children is equated with normalcy and respectability. Thus the influence and effectiveness of a spouseless and childless missionary, through no fault of his own, is comparatively weakened.

Other disadvantages are based more on the natural limitations of singleness. It can be somewhat awkward, for example, trying to counsel married couples and parents. You don't have to have your own family to teach what the Bible says about such matters, but lack of personal experience can often lessen the force of a single person's advice and influence. Another awkward,

even dangerous, situation presents itself when counseling, studying with, or ministering to members of the opposite sex. It is always wise to have a third party present, and when that is not possible, you run the risk of misunderstandings, false accusations, or even falling into sin. While this dilemma is by no means restricted to unmarried ministers, the non-availability of a third party can sometimes be a problem.

Probably the biggest disadvantage of being a single missionary is the lack of emotional support and companionship. This can be extremely difficult when separated from loved ones back home. Loneliness is a challenge for any single person, but it seems to be magnified on the mission field. Unless it can be put into perspective and reasonably dealt with<sup>3</sup>, loneliness can at best make one's missionary work a very unpleasant experience and at worst consume it.

No matter who you are or what your circumstance in life may be, it is simply not possible to have every advantage with no disadvantages, and vice versa. It is the solemn charge of every disciple to determine what his strengths are and to utilize them in Christ's service. Making excuses and shirking responsibilities bring no glory to God. If you are willing to take up the challenge, you will be amazed at what great things the Lord can accomplish through you (Acts 14:27; 15:4; 21:19). Capitalize on your advantages and use your unique situation in life to *"proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light"* (1 Peter 2:9).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Joyce Harden writes: “In reality, missionaries are very much like other Christians. They have the same weaknesses and strengths and in a group would probably not be distinguishable from anyone else” (“Women in Missions” in *Guidelines for World Evangelism*, ed. George Gurganus, p. 210).

<sup>2</sup>Evangelism, simply put, is “One beggar telling another where to find bread” (Charles Spurgeon).

<sup>3</sup>See chapter 11 for suggestions on dealing with loneliness.

## Chapter 4

# Where Do I Go? Choosing a Mission Field

Once you have decided to pursue a vocation in missions (which is no small matter), the next major decision is where to actually go. When I decided to do missionary work, there were about a thousand different places I wanted (and felt I needed) to be. It is by no means an easy decision. Since omnipresence is not a human attribute, we have to be content with being in only one place at a time. While there might be a number of different places you are interested in going, you simply have to narrow down your options. After his first visit to Ephesus, Paul announced, *“I will return again to you, God willing . . .”* (Acts 18:21). Paul made specific plans, but at the same time he realized that whatever he decided to do ultimately rested in God’s hands. *“A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps”* (Proverbs 16:9).

All major decisions in a Christian’s life should be preceded by prayer. *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him”* (James 1:5). At the same time, wise choices will not necessarily come easy or without personal effort. The wise man Solomon said that you must *“incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding . . . cry out for discernment . . .”*

*seek . . . search . . .*" (Proverbs 2:2-5). In determining a location to carry out your ministry of reconciliation, make sure that your prayers for wisdom are coupled with enough homework to make a well-informed choice. Once your decision is made, pray that God's will be done (James 4:13-15). If it is meant to be, God will providentially ensure that the right doors will open (2 Corinthians 2:12). If not, there is probably another mission field that is much more suitable for you (cf. Acts 16:6-10). To further clarify a point made in chapter one, remember that there is no inhabited place on earth where the gospel does not need to be proclaimed. Therefore it is not simply a matter of where you are needed, or even where you are needed the most, but where you are best suited to meet the greatest needs.

The information in this chapter will not necessarily make it easier for you to select a mission field. As a matter of fact, in some ways it might make your decision even harder. But there are some important considerations, which are sometimes overlooked, that you may want to take into account.

## **Population**

Most prospective missionaries understandably feel the need to go to a place where they can find the most non-Christians.<sup>1</sup> But if you choose the largest city or country in the world and are not suited to work there, you are defeating your purpose. It would be much better to go to a town of 10,000 and reach more people over a longer period of time than to go to a city of 10 million and make little or no progress.

When you focus on one place (regardless of its population), realize that there are always other places that are neglected. When compared to countries like China (with a population of

over a billion), it seems so insignificant to think about the smaller nations such as New Zealand (3.8 million), or Western Samoa (160,000), or the Cook Islands (18,500), or Niue Island (3,000), and so on. Generally the few missionaries among churches of Christ naturally feel pulled to the more populated locations, while those with fewer people are persistently overlooked. When you start adding up all these lesser-populated areas, it is apparent that millions throughout the world will have very little chance of ever hearing the gospel. I am not suggesting that a multitude of missionaries ought to converge on a tiny island or village and neglect other more populated areas, but I am saying that we shouldn't necessarily discount a place just because of its relatively few residents. Jesus died for everyone, including those in the less populated areas, and they deserve a chance to hear the gospel too.

Always remember that no matter where you are (whether in a huge city or a small village), a church is planted by reaching one soul at a time. Very few people are ever converted without personal contact, and realistically an individual missionary can only personally contact a limited number of people. So if, for example, your personal limit is 200 contacts per year, you realistically can't exceed that limit simply by living in a larger city. The only way to reach the world with the gospel is one person, one family, then one community at a time.

### **Strategy of Location**

While the apostle Paul no doubt took advantage of every opportunity he had to preach the gospel, it seems that he primarily targeted strategic locations. For example, Thessalonica was the largest and most prominent city in Macedonia and the capital of the province. On the way there he and his companions

*“passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia . . .”* (Acts 17:1). There is no indication that the gospel was preached as they passed through these two places, and it was probably Paul’s intention to establish the church in Thessalonica with hopes that the gospel would eventually spread to these nearby areas (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:8). It is important to think long-term. Will the congregation you establish be able to support itself, then plant other congregations throughout the region, which plant more congregations throughout the country and beyond?<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, one must consider how many missionaries or churches are already there or nearby, and what is the likelihood of the gospel reaching these people if you don’t go there?

### **Receptivity**

The receptivity of a people is clearly an important issue, but there are also other relevant matters to consider. A group might be labeled “unreceptive” even though they have not had sufficient opportunity to hear the unadulterated gospel. Never judge a book by its cover. *“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it”* (Isaiah 55:11).

Some communities are called “receptive” simply because it is relatively easy to baptize the people, but there can be a big difference between “baptizing” and “converting.” The Lord has commissioned us to “make disciples,” and part of this process is “baptizing them” (Matthew 28:18-20). But if we simply baptize people without making them disciples, we have not fulfilled the Great Commission (cf. Luke 14:25-33; John 8:12, 31-32, 51). If people are being baptized for the wrong reasons, or most “con-



verts” fall away, or churches are consistently weak (spiritually and doctrinally), then the word “receptive” is misleading. Though it may be more difficult and will probably take longer to convert people in these so-called “unreceptive” places, you often find that there is little question about their motives and they tend to make stronger Christians and remain faithful longer.

I tend to be a bit suspicious when I read mission reports, especially from inexperienced or temporary workers, reporting hundreds of baptisms during a brief campaign effort. The question is, what happens to these “converts” when the workers leave? Without adequate instruction before and continued teaching afterwards, these people inevitably (sometimes immediately) tend to drift back into their former way of life. If all these reports are taken at face value without any follow-up information, there ought to be hundreds more churches and thousands more Christians than can actually be found.

Valuable lessons can be learned from past Catholic and Protestant missions. Large numbers of these missionaries lost their lives attempting to preach in hostile lands, and many of them struggled for several years before the first converts were made.<sup>3</sup> Yet today there are entire communities, regions, islands, and nations professing some form of generic “Christianity” because of those willing to go to “unreceptive” fields. Imagine what could have been accomplished, and what can still be accomplished today, with the simple truth of the gospel! Moreover, throughout history, even when God knew that people would reject his message, he still felt that they deserved a chance to hear it (cf. Isaiah 6:9-13; Jeremiah 1:19; Ezekiel 3:11; Matthew 10:14). Jesus died for and told us to evangelize everyone, regardless of how we might judge their potential response.

## Immigration

There are some countries that are practically impossible to get into as an evangelist. Make sure you have investigated the immigration policies and restrictions, and avoid wasting a lot of valuable time and money. For nations that are closed to missionaries, you might consider the option of vocational ministry, that is, supporting yourself in secular employment while using the rest of your time to spread the gospel (cf. Acts 18:3; 20:34). If you have special skills which a government deems as needed, you may find it relatively easy to immigrate.<sup>4</sup> However, you will have to weigh the amount of time spent in secular work against the time needed for evangelistic endeavors.

## Collecting Information

When gathering details on particular mission fields, make sure you get as much *first-hand* data as possible. Compare what you get out of books or on the Internet with information from missionaries who are already there or have been there. Some of the data (especially missions statistics) can be inaccurate and misleading. Some missions' statistics count husbands and wives separately whereas others count them as one, so there may be about twice or only half as many missionaries in a given location as you thought. With missionaries regularly coming and going, the growth or decline of churches, and the variable nature of economies, it is hard to maintain up-to-date statistics. Although it is not essential, it is highly recommended that you make a **survey trip** to your prospective mission field before moving there. This will enable you to gather first-hand information, refine your expectations, and help confirm or reverse your decision. Bear in mind, however, that a brief visit is much different than actually

living there and will not necessarily give you a realistic impression. But generally this is better than not having been there at all.

## **Time Commitment**

How long do you plan to stay? If you only commit to a short period of time, it would probably be unwise to move to a country, for example, where language acquisition is quite difficult. You may find yourself returning home before or shortly after you have adequately learned the language, therefore failing to accomplish very much in the meantime.<sup>5</sup> If you find the living conditions intolerable or the cost of living much higher than you expected, you will have wasted precious resources by having to leave prematurely. Generally, the amount of time you are willing to commit will help determine where you ought to go.

While it is possible to accomplish *some* good in a short period of time, long-term missionary commitments have the potential of accomplishing so much more.<sup>6</sup> It generally takes at least a couple of years to settle into a new environment, feel comfortable, and really start being effective. Sadly, a number of missionaries have returned home by this time. While everybody is different and there is no hard-fast rule about time-commitments, the following is what I would recommend. Make a personal commitment to long-term missionary work without setting a long-term deadline. If, for example, you commit to a particular place for ten years and then leave before your commitment is fulfilled, you will likely carry with you a sense of failure or guilt. It might be better to commit to about four years, then reevaluate your situation after that time. If you feel that you are making progress and you are still needed there, commit to a couple more years, then reevaluate again. When the time is right, move on to

another location. It is easier to fulfill a four-year commitment with the option to stay longer than a greatly extended deadline with no alternatives. By leaving it open-ended, you may find yourself on the field much longer.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, there might be some who would tend to stay longer by setting a long-term goal instead of giving themselves a short-term option. Again, there is no hard-fast rule and you will have to determine what works best for you.

If you are looking for the “easiest” mission field, I can almost guarantee that such does not exist. Mission fields may be labeled “difficult” for two reasons: (1) poor or hostile living conditions, and/or (2) the non-receptivity of the people. Generally, with probable exceptions, the better the living conditions the more difficult it is to make conversions, and vice versa. It takes just as much stamina to live in a more comfortable environment where the visible progress of the Lord’s work is slow, than to live in poorer conditions where the work is more prosperous. Some missionaries can easily endure substandard living conditions as long as their work is fruitful, while others endure the slow and difficult nature of the work in a less formidable environment. If you are looking for “easy,” you might want to consider a career other than missionary work.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>By the year 2100, the world's most populous countries will be: India 1.6 b, China 1.5 b, Nigeria 508 m, the former Soviet Republic 376 m, Indonesia 356 m, Pakistan 316 m, USA 309 m, Bangladesh 297 m, Brazil 293 m, Mexico 196 m, Ethiopia 173 m, Vietnam 168 m, Iran 164 m, Zaire 138 m, Japan 128 m, Philippines 125 m, Tanzania 120 m, Kenya 116 m, Burma 112 m, Egypt 111 m (From the 1987 World Population Data Sheet of the Population Reference Bureau, Inc.).

<sup>2</sup>The biblical pattern for missionary work is to plant self-propagating, mission-minded congregations (2 Corinthians 1:16; Philipians 4:15-18; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8).

<sup>3</sup>Nearly one third of the Jesuits sent to China between 1581 and 1712 died before they even arrived! In the nineteenth century, in Ghana and Thailand, half the new missionaries died of disease. After twelve years in Ghana, all that the Basel Mission had to show for their efforts were eight missionary graves and only one survivor. Missionaries in Thailand worked for nineteen years before their first convert, and he wasn't even a Thai national! (Michael Griffiths, *Tinker, Tailor, Missionary*, pp. 19, 47-48, 122)

<sup>4</sup>For further discussion, see Carl Mitchell's "Vocational Evangelism" in *Perspectives on Worldwide Evangelization*, ed. C. Philip Slate, pp. 109-122. Carl also has this material printed in booklet form, with a Vocational Missionary Bibliography and a list of principal overseas hiring agencies.

<sup>5</sup>This is not to suggest that an English-speaking missionary cannot do a good work in a non-English-speaking environment, and obviously this scenario is better than having no missionary there at all. But for a good discussion on the importance of language acquisition as opposed to relying on translators or expecting your hearers to speak *your* language, see Gailyn Van Rheenen's *Mission Alive! Revitalizing Missions Among the Churches of Christ*, pp. 60-87.

<sup>6</sup>While many early missionaries were short-termers, it was mainly because of martyrdom or disease rather than choice. The possibility of *intentional* short-term missionary work is a relatively recent development, resulting from faster and affordable travel, not to mention fewer health risks. Michael Griffiths observes that "for short-termers there is a tremendous supply for which there is not a tremendous demand, whereas for long-term workers there is a tremendous

demand without much supply . . . . Those early missionaries, killed by disease before they had time to become proficient in language as ‘long-term’ missionaries, would have found it incomprehensible that [present-day] people, who could serve long-term without any risk to their health, would deliberately opt only for ‘short-term’ service!” (*Tinker, Tailor, Missionary*, pp. 121-136).

<sup>7</sup>It is not uncommon to go to the mission field with the idea buried deep in the back of your mind that you will eventually “get it out of your system.” You may find, however, that the longer you stay, it will become increasingly more difficult to leave.

## Chapter 5

# Raising and Maintaining Support (Part 1)

To be honest, asking for financial support has been one of my least favorite aspects of missionary work. Most missionaries probably wish they could just support themselves, without taking time away from the Lord's work, and not have to rely on anyone else for assistance. But even if this idealistic scenario were possible, in my humble opinion it would probably not be the best way to fund missionary work. If for no other reason, it would deny many brethren an opportunity to be involved in world-wide evangelism (cf. Romans 10:14; 12:8).

Before anything else is done to raise funds, it is highly recommended that the backing of a good sponsoring congregation is acquired.<sup>1</sup> A missionary ought to be answerable to a faithful eldership, and a strong congregation that feels responsible for him will add more stability and security to his work. Although having all of one's support provided by a single congregation would considerably cut down on the time and expense of traveling, fund-raising, and reporting, more often than not funds will have to be secured from a number of congregations and individuals. The positive side is that you are helping to get more brethren involved in foreign evangelism. And if you have a good sponsoring congregation to oversee your work, potential sup-

porters will be much more inclined to contribute. Furthermore, to avoid any possible questions or problems, it is wise that the funds be directly handled by someone other than the missionary himself.

No sensible eldership will agree to take oversight of a work unless it knows and has confidence in the missionary. It is a good idea to spend about six months to a year working with your sponsoring church. Among other things, this valuable time will enable the members of the congregation to get to know you better, thus encouraging them to be more personally involved in your work and helping to ensure a long-term working relationship. Although I was anxious to get to the mission field as soon as possible, I'm thankful my sponsoring congregation insisted that I work with them for six months. Consequently we have now had a good working relationship for over a decade and a half.

### **Attitudes Necessary for Fund-raising**

The first thing of which you need to be convinced is that you are not asking anyone to do you a favor. You are not begging for money! It is neither a burden nor a special privilege for evangelists to receive financial support for their labors. It is a God-given **right** (1 Corinthians 9:4-14), and sometimes brethren need to be reminded of their obligation to be involved in this divine plan.<sup>2</sup> When you raise support, you are giving your fellow Christians a chance to fulfill their divinely-ordained responsibility. The money is not for you — it is for the Lord's cause. And if you do not make the effort to secure the funds, consider how much of the Lord's work will be left undone! The Great Commission has been given to all of us. If some Christians are



not willing to “go,” then the only way they can obey the Lord’s command is to “send” someone else (Romans 10:14-15). Thank God for people like you who give them this opportunity!

Raising support is actually a good way to prepare for missionary work. If you can’t deal with the disappointments and frustrations of fund-raising, how are you going to cope on the mission field? Every time you receive a negative response, including no response at all, consider it part of your “toughening-up” process. A missionary’s faith is always stronger at the end of the fund-raising trail than at the beginning. Moreover, you must firmly believe that if God wants you on the mission field, he will, in time, provide the necessary means. This is not to say that you can just write a few letters and then sit back expecting the money to flow in. But if you do your part, including a lot of prayer and hard work, God will providentially ensure that the right doors are opened.

Finally, be enthusiastic, confident, and persistent. No one wants to misappropriate the Lord’s money on someone who easily gives up or is hesitant and unsure about what he is doing. If you firmly believe in your proposed plan of action, it ought to show. Enthusiasm is contagious. It will increase your effectiveness in selling yourself and your plans to prospective supporters, and you will not be easily discouraged along the way. If you have the necessary zeal, commitment, and determination to do missionary work, no obstacle can stand in your way.

### **Determining Financial Needs<sup>3</sup>**

How much support will you need to raise? Obviously financial extremes should be avoided. On one hand, if you don’t raise sufficient funds, you could end up disillusioned, ineffective in

your work, and maybe even return home prematurely. On the other hand, if your support is excessive, it could lead to a misuse of funds and leave a bad impression on those with whom you are working. Both you and your supporters must realize that economies vary throughout the world and a reliable indicator is not the cost of living at home. You may need more or you may need less than is required to live in the United States, so a lot of prayer, wisdom, common sense, and homework will be needed.

There are at least three things to calculate: salary, work fund, and one-time expenses. The **salary** should compensate for normal living expenses, like housing, electricity, food, clothing, insurance, medical care, et al. Your weekly contribution to the church should also be determined. A missionary, like anyone else in the work force, ought to have a savings scheme, including a plan for retirement. If you have outstanding debts (e.g. student loans, car payments, etc.), you should seek counsel in trying to determine what is legitimate to include in your support-raising and what is not. Always be up-front with your supporters. In some cases it may be necessary to postpone your departure until some of these debts are paid.

The **work fund** is to be used for disbursements directly related to the work, such as office supplies and equipment, postage for reports, printing or shipping of materials, advertising, travel expenses, and so forth. Keeping good records is very important, and a separate bank account for your work fund will help. You may want to include in your work-fund budget a periodic trip to the States for reporting, maintaining support, and raising additional funds as needed. Work-related expenses are tax deductible.

**One-time costs** would include things such as airfare, travel documents, a vehicle, moving and setting-up expenses (e.g. ship-

ping personal effects, purchasing furniture and appliances, etc.), and other one-time expenditures. As a general rule it is best to raise a little more than you think you might need, because there are always hidden costs that you have not planned for, such as fluctuating exchange rates, customs and immigration charges, bank fees, taxes, inflation, emergencies, and so on. Having an emergency fund, or at least a supporting congregation that agrees to cover unexpected expenses, will remove a lot of potential worries.

It is highly recommended that you make an appointment with a Christian accountant to figure out your income tax and Social Security obligations (both home and abroad).<sup>4</sup> You most certainly want to pay taxes to whom taxes are due (Romans 13:6,7), but you don't want to be a poor steward of the Lord's money and end up paying a lot more than is required.

Missionaries who are already on the field are the best source for determining financial needs. They will know first-hand how much it costs to move, settle in, and live in that particular location. If you are able to make a survey trip, you can gather much of this information yourself. The U. S. Government Information Bureau can also provide helpful data on foreign living costs.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The first Christian missionaries were sent out by and eventually returned to the Antioch church (Acts 13:1-3; 14:26), and Paul seems to have maintained a special relationship with this congregation (Acts 15:30, 40; 18:22). Moreover, the NT clearly sets forth the principle of cooperation among churches in carrying out the Lord's work (Acts 11:22-23, 27-30; 12:25; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:1-24; 9:1-15; 11:8-9; Romans 15:26), but how this cooperation is to be administered is not specifically addressed. Paul received financial support sometimes from a plurality of churches (2 Corinthians 11:8), sometimes from a single church (Philippians 4:16), and sometimes he supported himself (Acts 20:34), but no administrative "pattern" is outlined here. A brother in the Philippines once asked me why funds should be sent through a church when Paul's support was sent directly to him. My response was that no support can be "sent directly" to anyone without some type of intermediary (and often several), whether it be a messenger, a delegation, a congregation, a post office, a bank, etc. The "sponsoring church" concept is an expedient way for churches to cooperate in foreign evangelism without sacrificing autonomy (cf. Philippians 4:15).

<sup>2</sup>See also Matthew 10:9-13; Luke 10:3-8; Galatians 6:6; Philippians 2:25-30; 4:10-20; 1 Timothy 5:18. Paul actually felt like he had wronged the brethren at Corinth by not getting them to financially support his work like other congregations had done (2 Corinthians 12:13; cf. 11:8).

<sup>3</sup>Some of these ideas were adapted from Glenn Owens, "Fund-Raising" in *Steps into the Mission Field* by the São Paulo Brazil Mission Team, pp. 103-113.

<sup>4</sup>This has been one of my biggest headaches over the years, and I am very grateful to Charlie Cantrell and especially to Marvin Hutson of Cleveland, Tennessee for their most generous assistance.

## Chapter 6

# Raising and Maintaining Support (Part 2)

It is very important to remember that raising support will be of little benefit if it is not maintained. Keeping your supporters informed is essential to keeping them interested and involved in your work. A monthly or bi-monthly written report should be sent to each supporter and perhaps other interested parties. Putting together a well-written report can be very time consuming, but the time is well spent if it enables you to remain supported on the field. Some supporters understand and appreciate the time restraints and are therefore content with a bi-monthly report. However, if a monthly report is expected, a monthly report should be sent. If your sponsoring congregation agrees to reproduce and mail your reports, this will save you an enormous amount of time and expense.

If at all possible, a personal visit with your supporters' should be planned for every two to three years. This will not only allow you to boost their enthusiasm and answer their questions, but it will also give you a much needed break from the work. Although the "furlough" is meant to be restful, it seldom is because of the busy schedule of traveling, visiting, speaking, reporting, etc. However, the change of activities and environment offers a distraction from the normal routine and therefore provides a needed break.

## **The Fund-raising Procedure<sup>2</sup>**

First, develop a strong case. What do you plan to do, why do you wish to do it, and why should anyone want to support you? Make your case biblical, informative, and motivational. Have updated statistics showing the urgent need. Prepare a résumé listing your qualifications for this work.

Second, carefully prepare a budget that explains precisely how much money is needed and exactly how the money will be used. Make sure these figures are carefully researched, up-to-date, accurate, and reasonable.

Third, assign a specific timetable to what you hope to accomplish. When do you intend to be there, what are you doing in the meantime, and what short-term and long-term goals do you have. Rather than waiting to get full support before you set your departure date, step out in faith, set the date, and then work toward that goal.

Fourth, prepare a list of potential supporters, including churches and individuals. Those who are acquainted with you or your family and those who may already be involved in the geographical area you are targeting will be your best prospects. Even if you know just one person in a congregation who can vouch for you, this is usually better than the “cold turkey” approach. However, even if there is no preliminary association, the more names you have on your list, the better.

Fifth, seek appointments with individuals, elderships, missions committees, and/or congregations.<sup>3</sup> Write letters to as many prospective supporters as you can come up with, followed by phone calls and personal visits. Expect a lot of non-responses, a lot of “no” responses, and a lot of excuses. It can be very

disheartening to learn how little money is made available for missions because pews are being padded and parking lots are being paved. But bear in mind that every “no” puts you closer to a potential “yes”! You will likely go through a number of refusals in order to get a few good appointments. Even when no support is offered, you can still ask to speak to the congregation anyway and possibly prick the hearts of some who are prepared to contribute individually.<sup>4</sup>

Sixth, make a brief, well-organized, enthusiastic presentation. Be prepared to answer any number of questions. To whom are you accountable? What do you want to do, how do you intend to do it, and when? Why is this particular request so important? Where is this place and what are the needs? How much will it cost? How much do you want us to give? Who else is supporting this work and how much are they giving? Who all recommends this project? Who will be working with you? Leave an attractive printed piece of material that answers these questions and tells how you can be reached.

Seventh, do careful follow-up. Send thank you letters with additional information. If you haven't heard anything in a couple of weeks, make phone calls to see if a decision has been made. Often your request is just one of many they are considering, and it may get postponed, misplaced, or forgotten unless you take the initiative to remind them. Maintaining contact is critical.

Eighth, be accountable for your use of time and money. If you are lax and unreliable on the fund-raising trail, don't expect to generate much confidence in prospective supporters. Paul was very sensitive about how others perceived his handling of funds and his use of time (2 Corinthians 8:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 2:8-10). Remember that you are ultimately answerable to God.

Ninth, remain calm and collected. Seeking to raise support can be very stressful, but there is no excuse for getting impatient or losing your temper (cf. Galatians 5:22,23). Humility, patience, and kindness during times of great disappointment can open other doors of opportunity in the future. If you truly believe that God will provide the support you need, the rejections won't matter very much as you eagerly anticipate the positive responses to come. And if a congregation cannot support you because their budget is already stretched to the limit supporting other mission efforts, **be thankful!**

Tenth, persevere. To be a successful missionary you can't be one who easily gives up. You don't necessarily have to be a good fund-raiser to be a good missionary, but you do have to possess a certain amount of tenacity, endurance, and perseverance. The challenges of raising support can develop and strengthen these qualities and thus make you a better missionary.

“Praise God for young men and women who dream of lives dedicated to missions and then endure hardships as good soldiers in order to make their dreams come true.”<sup>5</sup>



## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Acts 14:26-28; 15:3-4; 18:22; 21:19-20; cf. Mark 6:31.

<sup>2</sup>The following points are adapted from Howard Norton's "How to be a successful fundraiser for missions programs" in *The Christian Chronicle* (July 1993), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Try to begin your support-raising at the time of year congregations are considering the preparation of their budgets.

<sup>4</sup>Even though I had not previously met Jerry Dan and Linda Darnall, they have been supporting my work since the beginning after hearing my presentation to the congregation they were attending.

<sup>5</sup>H. Norton, "How to be a successful fundraiser," *op. cit.*

# Chapter 7

## Mission Team or Solo?

Is it better for a single missionary to be part of a team or to work alone? Obviously individual choice, preference, personality, opportunity, and other variables must be taken into account. Having worked both as a solo missionary<sup>1</sup> and with a team, and acknowledging strengths and weaknesses in either approach, let me share what I consider to be the better option.

The lone missionary is not without precedent in the New Testament. John the immerser, as a single voice crying in the wilderness (John 1:23), was quite successful in his ministry. Stephen's very brief evangelistic career was solo (Acts 6:9 ff.). Philip the evangelist appears to have begun as an individual missionary (Acts 8:5-40), although he eventually settled in Caesarea with his family and probably worked with other Christians there (Acts 8:40; 9:30; 10:1; 18:22; 21:8-9). Apollos seems to have done very well on his own (Acts 18:24-28; 1 Corinthians 3:6). After Timothy and Titus completed their missionary apprenticeships with Paul, they evidently, at least on occasion, worked alone (Philippians 2:19; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 1 Timothy 1:3; Titus 1:5). However, these few examples notwithstanding, there seems to be more emphasis in the New Testament on team missions than for the other alternative.

There is still a lot of wisdom in the ancient proverb, "Two are better than one . . . . And a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). When Jesus began his public ministry, he

almost immediately started forming a team (Matthew 4:17-22). The twelve were sent out “two by two,” and later the seventy were deployed in the same manner (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1). Once Paul was an established missionary, he rarely, if ever, worked alone (Acts 11:25-26; 13:2-5; 15:40; 16:1-3; 20:4; et al.). Even in places like Athens and Corinth, where it appears that he was initially by himself, Paul wasn’t without coworkers for long (cf. Acts 17:15; 18:2-5; 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2). John, Silvanus, and Mark were among those who worked with Peter (Acts 3:1; 8:14; 1 Peter 5:12, 13). Barnabas, Luke, Timothy, Titus, Aristarchus, Gaius, and a host of other early missionaries were regularly involved in mission teams.

Advantages for team missions are many. Unless a person is psychologically or sociologically impaired, there is an innate need for human companionship. No man is an island, as the saying goes.<sup>2</sup> When a task is being undertaken as important as saving souls, a person should want to perform at his best. As a general rule, human beings function better and are discouraged less when there is a mutual sharing of the load. It is a mismanagement of human resources when a lone missionary ventures off to a foreign field without adequate emotional and spiritual support, only to return home disillusioned, discouraged, and dejected.

Missionaries, even the best ones, are not super-human spiritual giants. They, too, need encouragement and stirring up to love and good works (Hebrews 3:13; 10:24). There is mutual support and accountability in a group of strong Christians working together. While I have learned a great deal from many different sources, one of my best teachers has been personal experience. As I labored with the church in Wellington, New Zealand, being surrounded by other faithful Christians, one of my biggest

problems was working too hard and too much. However, when I made periodic mission trips to Niue Island and some of the Cook Islands, being the only NT Christian there, I found it more difficult to keep myself motivated and to be as diligent in the work. Whether it is fear, loneliness, or any other apprehension, it is a fact that a missionary is usually more productive when there are others to spur him on.

Working in a team also gives fellow missionaries the opportunity to pool their resources. Not everyone has the same talents, and the church thrives because members complement one another's strengths and compensate for each other's weaknesses (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27). No matter how hard a lone missionary tries, it is simply not possible to do everything that needs to be done. A missionary, among other things, is an evangelist, a teacher, a student, a preacher, a minister, a counselor, a writer, a secretary, a fund-raiser, a leader, a servant, a treasurer, a record-keeper, a mediator, a janitor, and on the list goes. Few things are more frustrating for the missionary than having to leave some things undone in order to do other things. However, in a team situation more of these jobs can be accomplished and they can be done more efficiently as tasks are delegated according to the abilities of team members. Plus, by pooling financial resources, more money is available to purchase equipment or accomplish tasks that probably couldn't be done with a single work fund.

The concept of team missions also gives more Christians the opportunity to do missionary work. For example, a man who is not a capable preacher or evangelist would probably not be suited for missionary work by himself. However, in a team situation, where others can do most of the preaching and evangelizing, this

same person could be useful with whatever skills he does have. And by using his special talents, whether it be translating, plumbing, book-keeping, etc., he frees up others to focus on what they're good at doing. And if one gets sick or has to be away from the work for whatever reason, others are there to take up the slack.

Missionaries are often faced with having to make difficult decisions. Certainly good decisions can be made by an individual missionary and bad ones can be made by a group, but generally the more input that is available, the better. *"Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established"* (Proverbs 15:22; cf. 11:14; 24:6). The work is generally more effective and easier to manage when there are others to help carry the load.

Another advantage, especially if the church is being started from scratch, is that the nucleus of the congregation is already present. A greater impact can be made by a group than by a solitary missionary working alone. When one man is doing all the preaching, teaching, song-leading, public praying, etc., it probably makes less of an impression on visitors than if multiple men of varying talents are taking part, not to mention the quality of the singing!

On the other side of the coin, it must be conceded that the team-mission approach has its shortcomings. For example, if every missionary went to a different location rather than grouping together in concentrated areas, the gospel could surely be taken to more of the world. Furthermore, some people seem to be better suited to work alone. Since a missionary effort can be devastated by personality clashes, power struggles, and other interpersonal conflicts between fellow workers, it might be better

for some to work alone.<sup>3</sup> However, this argument is somewhat weakened by the fact that “*the body is not one member but many*” (1 Corinthians 12:14), and any Christian’s inability to get along with and work with others must be overcome with much prayer, humility, and selfless concern for the Lord’s cause. If you can’t be a “team-player” yourself, how are you going to promote a spirit of unity and cooperation among the people you serve?

Another disadvantage of team-missions is the temptation of team members to rely too much on each other, not getting involved in the community and not training locals to be more involved in the work. All missionaries must avoid this pitfall and constantly be reminded of their primary long-range goal: the existence of a faithful, growing, indigenous congregation. The best way to accomplish this goal is for each missionary to eventually work his way out of a job, having trained the local brethren to carry on without him.

Obviously, whether one works with a team or alone, there is not just one right way to do missionary work. But my advice is to be part of a team if at all possible, and if that doesn’t work out, then do the best you can in whatever situation you are in, realizing that you are never really working alone (1 Corinthians 3:7-9)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The main reason I went to the mission field alone was because I was unable (or at least didn't put enough effort into the search) to find others who were willing to go. Sometimes it is a matter of either going by yourself or not going at all.

<sup>2</sup>"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." John Donne, *Meditation XVII* (1624).

<sup>3</sup>Even when conflict forces a missionary team to split up, there is no need for the local work to suffer and much good can still be accomplished (cf. Acts 15:36-41). However, this illustrates the need to know your coworkers, to spend time with them, and to have a good relationship with them *before* you go to the mission field.

# Chapter 8

## Single Women on the Mission Field

Although most of the material in this book is applicable to either gender, single women fill a special role in missionary work and therefore deserve a chapter of their own. What can a single woman do on the mission field? Many brethren, including single women themselves, may be skeptical about their role and usefulness in missions.<sup>1</sup> Putting aside the usual stereotypes and preconceived notions, let's consider what the Bible says.

Many women followed and ministered unto Jesus (Matthew 27:55,56), and are among the finest examples of faith, generosity, and service recorded in the New Testament (cf. Matthew 9:20-22; 15:22-28; Mark 12:41-44; 14:8,9). The greatest event in history was first witnessed and announced by godly women (Matthew 28:1-10). The first "missionary" to Samaria was female (John 4:28-30, 39-42). Women formed part of the nucleus when the Lord's church began (Acts 1:14; 2:41), and the number of receptive women who obeyed the gospel was an important factor in the rapid growth of early Christianity (Acts 5:14; 8:12; 17:4,12,34). Among those in Berea who "searched the Scriptures daily" and responded to the truth were noble-minded women (Acts 17:11,12). The church at Philippi initially consisted of devout women and met in a woman's home (Acts 16:13-18,40).



Because of their uncompromising faith these dedicated, first-century Christian women even suffered brutal persecution (Acts 8:3; 9:2; 22:4).

Tabitha “*was full of good works and charitable deeds*” (Acts 9:36). Phoebe was “*a servant of the church in Cenchrea,*” whom Paul said “*has been a helper of many and of myself also*” (Romans 16:1,2). Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis “*labored much in the Lord*” (Romans 16:6,12). Euodia and Syntyche labored with Paul in the gospel (Philippians 4:2,3). There were widows who were “*well reported for good works,*” who “*brought up children . . . lodged strangers . . . washed the saints’ feet . . . relieved the afflicted . . . diligently followed every good work*” (1 Timothy 5:10). Any candid observer of church work and church history must concede that godly women have always been the backbone of the Lord’s church.

Since Christian women are to be “*teachers of good things*” (Titus 2:3), we find that a number of them in the New Testament were endowed with the miraculous gift of prophecy (Acts 2:17,18; 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5).<sup>2</sup> It stands to reason that if God had given this gift and the responsibilities of teaching and service to women, he would have expected them to be utilized. At the same time, however, there are certain restrictions placed upon Christian women. They are not permitted to teach or have authority over men (1 Timothy 2:11,12), nor are they allowed to speak as to lead the public assembly (1 Corinthians 14:34,35).

Some have mistakenly concluded that the role of male leadership indicates that women are in some way inferior to men. However, even though male headship implies female subordination (1 Corinthians 11:3), submission and inferiority are not equivalents. While all Christians have been directed to love,

serve, and submit to one another (Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 5:5), each has been allocated different functions to perform. For example, elders are to “rule over” the flock and function as “overseers” (Hebrews 13:7-24; 1 Peter 5:2), and the other members are called upon to “obey” and “submit” to them (Hebrews 13:17). As far as the relationship to one another in Christ is concerned, there is equality and mutual submission among all believers. At the same time, there are different God-ordained roles, involving leadership and unilateral submission, to be respected and fulfilled.

Whatever a Christian woman does in the Lord’s service, she ought to be sensitive to *“the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God”* (1 Peter 3:3-5). She should be one who *“trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day”* (1 Timothy 5:5). A faithful Christian woman *“cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit”* (1 Corinthians 7:34).

What can a single woman do on the mission field? There are any number of ministries in which she can be involved, including evangelism, prayer, teaching children’s and ladies’ Bible classes, correspondence work, youth activities, encouraging weak Christians and other singles, secretarial work, counseling, developing teaching materials, language acquisition, translating, writing, baby-sitting, easing the work load of other missionaries, providing transport, teaching special skills, and the list could go on. But instead of making a longer list, the best answer to this question, given by one female missionary, is the following: *“Whatever I can that needs to be done.”*<sup>3</sup>

A single woman, serving the Lord in an environment foreign

to her own, must be acutely aware of special problems she may encounter. For any woman in any culture, personal safety can be compromised if good judgment is not exercised. If at all possible single women should travel and work in pairs or in groups or with coworkers, but rarely alone. In many cultures women are expected to be married and have children, so the single female missionary may face a certain amount of suspicion, prejudice, and castigation. It is very important that cultural norms be learned and respected (e.g. women not exposing their hair in certain Middle Eastern countries). Nevertheless, these challenges pale in significance to the good she can accomplish and the special needs she can fill.

Any single woman who exhibits a sincere desire to do whatever she can for the Lord with whatever abilities, opportunities and resources she may have, deserves all the respect, encouragement, support, and appreciation she is due. Thank God for the single missionary woman.<sup>4</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Phyllis Gonçalves, who has done missionary work in Brazil for over a quarter of a century, says that her home congregation would not support her because of her gender, and the discouragement associated with fund-raising almost kept her off the mission field (“Truly Supporting Missionaries” in *Christian Woman*, Sept.-Oct. 1999, p. 26).

<sup>2</sup>The following two paragraphs are adapted from the author’s book, *We Have No Such Custom: A Critical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16*, pp. 37, 45, 92. The miraculous gifts recorded in the New Testament were necessary for communicating and confirming God’s message during the time when the church was in its infancy and without God’s complete, written revelation (cf. Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4). But now that God’s word is complete, these miraculous gifts have served their purpose and are no longer needed or available (John 20:30,31; 1 Corinthians 13:8-10; 2 Timothy 3:16,17).

<sup>3</sup>Grace Johnson Farrar, “Opportunities for Women on the Mission Field” in *Christian Bible Teacher* (March 1988), p. 103.

<sup>4</sup>I want to make special acknowledgment of Jennifer Laton, a single lady who worked with us for a couple of years in Wanganui, New Zealand in conjunction with Freed-Hardeman University’s S.O.W.E.R. program. She was an invaluable part of our work and without her help much would have been left undone.

# Chapter 9

## Dating

### on the Mission Field

While it is of utmost importance for any missionary to be familiar with the peculiar customs of his/her host country, this is most crucial with respect to male-female interaction and relationships. One of the worst things a single missionary can do is to naively assume that everyone shares the same views about these matters. The casual, care-free attitude about dating, as is common among most North Americans, is by no means universal.<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, the idea of “recreational dating” is not only foreign to many, it is offensive to some. In a number of cultures, if dating is practiced at all, it is something one does only if marriage is the intention. As a general rule, then, if you don’t intend to marry, don’t date. And if you are only planning to be in your host country for a short period of time, again it is best not to date.

Just about every missionary apprenticeship program organized by our Christian schools has a policy of no dating for its interns. Although many apprentices may not fully understand, appreciate, or agree with it, the seasoned missionaries who are responsible for the policy must have good reasons for it. It is important to carefully consider your motives. If you are simply wanting to cope with loneliness or to occupy your time or to sat-

isfy other self-interests or selfish desires, remember what your primary mission is. The motives behind ministry and the motives behind self-gratification are mutually exclusive. It is sometimes necessary to make personal sacrifices for the kingdom's sake, and forgoing assumed rights and perceived needs is much better than leaving behind a broken heart or a compromised influence.

If you plan to be on the mission field long-term and you haven't ruled out the possibility of marriage, then it is best not to enter into courtship until you have developed a good understanding of local expectations and norms. If you do date, make sure you are sensitive to cultural conventions and taboos. For example, in many cultures holding hands in public is acceptable for same-gender friends, having no sexual connotation, but is frowned upon in male-female relationships. Be extremely careful about public (and private) displays of affection. You could end up sending the wrong message, embarrassing or shaming your partner and your partner's family, offending the locals, and getting yourself into a lot of trouble. You could even ruin an innocent person's reputation, not to mention your own, by doing something that may be legitimate in your own culture but inappropriate in theirs. If in doubt, don't do it! If you are going to make a mistake, err on the side of caution. Always remember that "dating is as much a responsibility as it is a privilege" (Gary Beauchamp, *God Loves the Single Too*, p. 129).

No matter what country you are in, courtship and marriage must never be taken lightly.<sup>2</sup> Marriage is for life (Matthew 19:3-9), so don't let your emotions or your hormones lead you into a sudden, irrational, and irresponsible decision. Take your time and count the cost. In less developed countries, to marry a foreigner is often seen as a status symbol or an opportunity to

improve one's economic situation, so be discerning about the intentions of your potential spouse. In places where Christians are few and far between, you may cause resentment among the local singles by marrying one of the few available Christians, thus further limiting their chances of finding a Christian mate.

Interracial, intercultural, and international marriages have their own unique challenges.<sup>3</sup> In many cases you are not just marrying the person you love, but you are expected to accommodate and/or support the extended family as well. Moreover, at least one of you will always be separated from his/her loved ones and native environment. Other considerations include cultural differences, social implications (i.e. prejudice and discrimination), how your children may be affected, how your work may be affected, immigration and deportation policies, et al. Of course none of this really matters if the couple genuinely loves each other and are both faithful Christians. But rushing into a relationship without considering these potential problems will surely result in a great deal of disappointment and regret.<sup>4</sup>

If your main purpose for moving to the mission field is to find a spouse, then you are going for the wrong reason. Not only will your marital options be more limited (if you intend to marry a Christian), but a lot of time and energy can be taken away from the Lord's work if you are preoccupied and distracted in your quest for a mate. It's all right to keep your eyes open in case someone special comes along, but don't let that be your primary aspiration in life.

The following prayer is a good model for the single missionary:

“Dear Father, I give my life to you. I want my will to always be submissive to yours. If remaining single is in the best interest of my Christian service, then please help me have the strength to accept it and to be at peace. If, however, you have determined that marriage is in my best interest and will help rather than hinder my service to you, then please let me find a suitable lifetime partner — someone who will share my convictions and dreams, who will help me stay faithful and encourage me in my missionary work, and who will, in turn, be open to my Christ-centered influence. In the meantime, help me to be content and to devote my time and energy to your work. My life is in your hands. Not my will, but your will be done. In the name of Jesus, my supreme example, Amen.”

God *will* hear and answer this prayer (1 John 5:14,15).



## Notes

<sup>1</sup>“There are more cultures world-wide in which dating does not exist than there are cultures wherein dating does exist. The majority of the married people in the world today married without experiencing dating-courtship. Dating primarily exists in Western cultures. It does not exist in most third world countries. In most such cultures there is a strict segregation of the sexes, and marriages are arranged by families” (David W. Chadwell, “Courtship: Preparation for Marriage” in *Just A Christian*, 1985 FHC Lectureship, p. 44).

<sup>2</sup>David Chadwell observes that “no area of decision is more critical or laden with greater consequences than is the area of dating. Dating offers the hope of this earth’s greatest blessing: a lifetime of fulfillment produced through loving companionship with a devoted mate. Dating also has the potential of producing the most traumatic consequences of human relationships on earth. There are no greater hurts in life than those produced by the pain of marital failure” (“Courtship: Preparation for Marriage,” op. cit., p. 43).

<sup>3</sup>These challenges are not new, illustrated by the problems resulting from Moses’ ethnically-mixed marriage (Numbers 12:1-15). However, any form of racial or ethnic prejudice that may be exhibited by any of God’s people is sinful, reprehensible, and must be repented of (cf. Matthew 7:12; 28:19; Luke 10:29-37; Acts 10:28, 34-35; 15:7-9; 17:26; Romans 2:11; 10:12; 2 Corinthians 10:7; Galatians 2:11-14; 3:26-28; Ephesians 6:9; Philippians 2:3; James 2:1-13).

<sup>4</sup>In his tract *The Time to Get a Divorce*, David Sain writes: “Remember, there is something worse than being alone, and that is being married to the wrong kind of person. The time to get a divorce is before you marry!” (p. 19). Although David is addressing moral and spiritual rather than ethnic considerations, the principle is still worthy of attention.

# Chapter 10

## Coping with the Pressures

Unique to the unmarried person are certain stigmas and unspoken expectations, along with a number of inevitable pressures. The general attitude of society appears to be that adults are *supposed* to be married. How often does a single man or woman hear questions like, “How’s your love-life?” or “Have you found that ‘special someone’ yet?” or “When are you going to settle down and get married?” Though nearly always unintentional, the implications of these “innocent” questions are that singleness is abnormal, and a person is incomplete without a mate and should be pitied.

Accompanying the pressures generated by others are the self-inflicted ones. Largely sparked by these unwarranted stigmas, it is easy to develop a low self-esteem and to feel insecure. At times it will seem like you don’t fit in, especially if most of your friends are married. You may feel incomplete, like something is missing in your life. You can easily deceive yourself into believing, or allow yourself to be deceived by others, that you can’t be happy unless or until you get married. You might become impatient and feel desperate to find a lifetime partner. What single person doesn’t battle loneliness, longing for companionship and reciprocal affection? Sexual frustration and temptation can also be major struggles. There may even be feelings of hopelessness (“Is God punishing me?”). Depression, anxiety, and diminished faith are not uncommon.<sup>1</sup>

For those who find it difficult to cope with the pressures of single life, the following suggestions might be helpful.

**1. Realize that you are not the only one** (Hebrews 12:1). The Bible is filled with examples of great men and women who were unmarried, not the least of whom was our Lord Jesus Christ. Millions of people throughout the world are in the same situation as you. Contrary to how you may feel at times, you are not the only one.

**2. Remove yourself from the center of your life** (1 Corinthians 10:24). The reason many struggle with single-hood is because they are too absorbed with self and are consequently filled with self-concern. In order to be happy one must learn to replace self-centeredness with servant-mindedness. Jeremiah may be known as “the weeping prophet,” but his tears had nothing to do with his single status. His focus was beyond himself. The interests of God and others must always supersede one’s own (Matthew 22:37-39).

**3. Keep your eyes focused on Jesus** (Hebrews 12:2). Remember that Jesus lived his life as a single man, and he experienced every struggle and temptation that other unmarried persons face (Hebrews 2:18). He is our perfect example. If singles would spend more time focusing on Jesus, and less time searching for partners or feeling sorry for themselves, their lives would be much more fulfilling.

**4. Stay actively involved in the Lord’s work** (1 Corinthians 15:58). All Christians, regardless of marital status, should be so busy laboring for the Master that they have no time to feel isolated, struggle with temptation, and worry about their temporal lives. There are plenty of things unmarried Christians can do in the Lord’s service (1 Corinthians 7:32).

**5. Develop close relationships with your spiritual family** (Ephesians 2:19). The love, support, and companionship one may be lacking without a spouse can, to some degree, be supplied in the fellowship of God's people (Mark 10:29,30; Hebrews 10:24). Loneliness and self-pity ought to diminish as intimate ties are formed with Christian brothers and sisters.

**6. Learn to appreciate the blessings of singleness** (1 Corinthians 7:25-35). Whether you are married or single, you should take advantage of your particular circumstance and use it to the glory of God. Since unmarried Christians normally have fewer family responsibilities, their time and resources can be more readily devoted to spiritual service. Appreciate the fact that the single life is free from many of the problems faced by married couples. Utilize your situation to reach out to other singles who may be struggling more than you.

**7. Trust in God** (Psalm 37:3-6). When you put your life into God's hands, you don't have to worry about your marital status because he knows what's best for you. He can help you overcome any temptations and struggles you may be experiencing (Psalm 62:8). Do you trust in God enough to accept your current situation in life?

**8. Be content** (Philippians 4:11-13). Lasting joy and contentment do not depend on outward circumstances but develop from within (Proverbs 4:23; 23:7). Marriage, in and of itself, is no guarantee for happiness (as the high divorce rate affirms). Instead of making matrimony your primary goal in life, learn to be content within yourself. *"But godliness with contentment is great gain"* (1 Timothy 6:6).

**9. Pray regularly** (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Whenever you

struggle with loneliness, frustration, discouragement, and temptation, remember that you can talk to God and he has promised to bear these burdens for you (Philippians 4:6,7; 1 Peter 5:7). Jesus spent much of his single life on his knees (Luke 5:16).

**10. Commit your life totally to the Lord** (Ecclesiastes 12:13). The Bible does not describe the whole duty of man as getting married and having a family, but rather to reverence God and keep his commandments. Whether a person is married or single, life cannot be complete without God. The joy of living is experienced, regardless of one's status in life, by a meaningful relationship with the Lord (Psalm 4:1-8; 5:11,12).

**11. Be patient** (Hebrews 6:12). If you have not totally disregarded the idea of marriage and God sees that it is in your best interest, there is always hope for the future. But until then you will have wasted a great deal of time, energy, and peace of mind if you have not learned to trust in God, to be content, and above all to be patient. How sad it would be to prematurely rush into a substandard union out of desperation while someone much more suitable (or even a fulfilling single life) is waiting in your future.<sup>2</sup>

God loves you and wants what is best for you. He has made you the way you are, allowed you to be where you are, and God doesn't make mistakes. *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths"* (Proverbs 3:5-6).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>However, “it is not *true* that all single adults are excessively lonely, frantically looking for a mate, bad credit risks, afraid of intimacy or responsibility, spiritually immature, angry, or wallowing in self-pity. Each single, like every married person, is a unique human being with individual strengths and needs” (Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counseling*, p. 137).

<sup>2</sup>Thomas B. Warren writes, “. . . your choice of a life’s companion may be the choice of a destiny” (*Marriage is For Those Who Love God — and One Another*, p. 32).

# Chapter 11

## Overcoming Obstacles (Part 1): Fear and Loneliness

### Confronting Fear

*“The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe”* (Proverbs 29:25). Fear is probably what keeps most Christians off the mission field in the first place. But if you have been “bitten by the mission bug,” you will find that your enthusiasm and determination pretty much overshadow any fear you may have had . . . that is, until the day comes for you to say good-bye to family and friends or when you first arrive in your host country. The fear from which you had largely been distracted raises its ugly head and overwhelms your senses the moment your missionary dream enters the world of reality. If you are not expecting it, and if you have bought into those sermons and articles which led you to believe that faithful Christians aren’t supposed to be afraid, you will be caught off guard, confused, and guilt-ridden.

The first thing you must realize is that it’s okay to be afraid. There is a vast difference between fear and cowardliness. It is a

sin to be cowardly (Revelation 21:8), but it is not sinful to be afraid. A person is a coward when he allows his fear to control his life and hold him back. Courage, on the other hand, is not the absence of fear; it is acting *in spite of* fear. Have you ever noticed what every great hero of faith in the Bible had in common? It wasn't superior intelligence, or remarkable talent, or outstanding leadership skills, or exceptional charisma, or extraordinary moral strength, or unprecedented bravery. The one thing they all seem to have had in common was — **fear**.

The renowned military leader Gideon began his illustrious career with very little faith, moving on to dismal insecurity, persistent doubt, and nagging fear (Judges 6:11-27). What eventually made Gideon great was the fact that he acted by faith (as weak as it may have been) despite all of these impediments. It was Gideon's submission to God, and God working in his life, that made the difference.

Before Esther became the heroine of Israel, bravery was not one of her greatest assets. When first given the opportunity to take a stand for her people, Esther chose to make an excuse and do nothing (Esther 4:8-17). When given a second chance, instead of bravely rising to the occasion she timidly retreated in procrastination (5:6-8). It was only when Esther confronted her fear and courageously took action that she and her nation were blessed.

David was an exceptional man of God, but not because he lacked fear. On the contrary, he was well acquainted with fear (1 Samuel 21:12; 2 Samuel 22:5). What set him apart from so many others is the fact that when fear was "*on every side*," David prayed, "*I trust in You, O Lord . . . You are my God*" (Psalm 31:13,14). David acknowledged: "*I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears*" (Psalm 34:4; cf.



46:1,2; 56:3,4). David had great faith because his fear produced an even greater dependence on God. As he refused to let apprehension and insecurity control his life, stepping out in obedient faith and unwavering trust in the Lord, his fear subsided.

Paul, the epitome of courage and strength, spent much of his missionary career "*in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling*" (1 Corinthians 2:3; 2 Corinthians 7:5). Paul's great accomplishments were achieved, not because he was never afraid, but because the Lord was with him every step of the way (Acts 18:9,10; 1 Corinthians 15:10). From a human perspective Paul may have had every reason to be afraid, but he never used fear as an excuse.

The courage of Jesus is demonstrated throughout the Gospels (Mark 8:31; John 7:25,26; et al.), but as a human being he was not unacquainted with fear (Hebrews 2:14-18). How could any man have faced the cross without some degree of apprehension? (John 12:27; Hebrews 5:7; Matthew 26:39; Luke 22:44). But Jesus went to the cross anyway. And aren't you glad he did?! Imagine the predicament we'd all be in if he had been like so many of us and allowed fear to rule the day. Stronger than the most intense fear was his submission to the Father and his love for you and me. Maybe we should consider this whenever we are tempted to let fear keep us from saying or doing something for Jesus.

Fear, in and of itself, is obviously not a bad thing, especially if it causes greater dependence on God and less on self, and if it doesn't control your life and prevent you from doing what the Lord expects you to do. While "*God has not given us a spirit of fear*" (2 Timothy 1:7), we all know this unfavorable human attribute still haunts us from time to time. But with the Lord's help

it doesn't have to be an insurmountable obstacle. It's okay to be afraid as long as you step out in faith and take action anyway.

Fear is never okay when it is used to justify inactivity. It was fear that caused the one-talent servant to lose his soul (Matthew 25:25-30). More precisely, it was fear that he used as an excuse to do nothing, and his idleness cost him his soul. Whatever you're afraid of, if it is something worthwhile that God wants you to do, don't let fear hold you back. Step out in faith, confront your fear, and allow God to do "*great things past finding out, yes, wonders without number*" (Job 9:10).

### **Dealing with Loneliness**

One of the biggest obstacles faced by the single missionary is loneliness, although this is not to be confused with simply being alone. *Aloneness* is a physical circumstance that is sometimes negative (Ecclesiastes 4:10), but can actually be a good thing when used in a wholesome, constructive manner (cf. Matthew 14:23; John 6:15). *Loneliness*, on the other hand, is a mental/emotional state that is generally negative and involves more than just being alone. Whether you are by yourself or in a crowd, loneliness is felt when you long for personal contact, for someone with whom to share your thoughts and experiences, and are simply not happy being physically or psychologically alone.

A single person can often cope with loneliness by having an active social life and a number of close friends. But the missionary has left those friends behind, and until new ones can be made (which is neither quick nor easy amid cultural and language differences), an unpleasant void remains. A pet or even a radio or television may offer some relief, but there is no adequate substitute for one's innate need for human companionship.

In the absence of close, personal relationships, there is probably no surefire cure for loneliness. Maybe this is our Creator's way of ensuring that the majority of us do not become hermits. The best thing to do is to get busy. A busy person is rarely a lonely person. It ought to be no problem for a missionary to find plenty of things to occupy his time. When you remain active, especially absorbed in your work, you tend to forget about self. Loneliness is always worse during times of leisure. And when you are not actively serving others, immerse yourself in deep, meaningful Bible study. Loneliness can be a powerful motivator. You'll be surprised at how much you will grow and how much you can accomplish simply by trying to avoid loneliness!

A word of caution is in order, however. It is possible to put so much time and energy into your work that you burn yourself out. If this happens, you will hardly accomplish anything and will be of little use to the Lord or to anyone else. Time off (aleness) is indispensable (Mark 6:31). But if you take time off to avoid burnout, the feelings of loneliness generally set in. By staying busy to avoid loneliness, you run the risk of burnout. Here is where balance is crucial. You could try to gauge this by how you feel on any given occasion, taking a break when you start feeling the symptoms of burnout and getting busy when you start feeling lonely. But a demanding schedule and the variable nature of emotions make this approach impractical and extremely difficult to achieve a consistent balance. A better solution is to have one set day a week (and possibly a vacation time each year) when you remove yourself from your working environment. Whether this involves leaving town or merely unplugging the phone, you simply need this time to withdraw from the pressures and demands of work.

At first you may feel guilty. How can I take a break when there is so much to do?! Try to understand, however, that you simply cannot do everything. Even if you were able to work around the clock, 24 hours each day, it is just humanly impossible to accomplish every single task that needs to be done. Furthermore, by trying to do *everything* you will inevitably reach the breaking point (burnout) and then accomplish *nothing*. It is healthier, wiser, and much more profitable to follow the example of Jesus, who said, “*I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day . . .*” (John 9:4), and then “*often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed*” (Luke 5:16) and encouraged his disciples, “*Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest awhile*” (Mark 6:31).

Common sense will tell you that even when you take time off it is important to stay busy. Find a hobby, read, exercise, travel, get “lost” in the city, or do anything else that will keep your mind occupied. Dr. Gary Beauchamp, in his book *God Loves the Single Too*, says “that the basic cause for loneliness is often deeply associated with ‘self-centeredness.’ Prolonged loneliness is the result of feeling sorry for oneself, self-pity, a preoccupation with self” (p. 68). This assessment will not necessarily alleviate the pain or reality of loneliness or make it any easier to deal with, but it can help pinpoint its root cause and emphasize the need to refocus.

The Lord teaches us to take our attention off of self (Matthew 16:24). The best way to do this is to focus attention on others and their needs. “Take leave of self then you will find others” (Jack Exum, *How to Win Souls Today*, p. 23). Be a servant. Spend quality time with brethren, both strong and weak. This will not only help build stronger relationships and strengthen those who

need your encouragement, but you will find that it benefits you just as much as, if not more than, anyone else.

When you find yourself getting lonely, do what Jesus did — pray. As important as other people are to one's emotional well being, there are fundamental needs that no other human being can satisfy. God created each one of us with a God-sized hole that only he can fill. Even if it were possible for another person to meet most of your basic needs, the fact is that human beings are imperfect, forgetful, and temporal.<sup>1</sup> But we have divine assurance that we will never be completely alone (Philippians 4:9). The Lord will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5,6). He will always be there to listen and to bear our burdens (Psalm 55:22).

## Notes

'Dr. Gary Collins observes: "Whenever our happiness, purpose in life and self-worth depend almost completely on some one other person, a dependency relationship has developed which can be dangerous and destructive should that other person ever fail, die, or leave" (*Christian Counseling*, p. 135).

# Chapter 12

## Overcoming Obstacles

### (Part 2):

# Temptation and Discouragement

#### Conquering Temptation

*“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5:8). To be human is to be subject to temptation. For the single Christian who is trying to remain morally pure, sexual temptation can be a real problem. This is especially true in a world where the concepts of abstinence and restraint are rarely considered and often ridiculed.

We are admonished to: *“Flee sexual immorality”* (1 Corinthians 6:18). And do not foolishly think that marriage is the absolute cure for sexual temptation. If that were true there would be no such thing as extramarital affairs. Remember that David had a plurality of wives but still fell into sexual sin (2 Samuel 11:2-4), whereas the unmarried Joseph avoided it (Genesis

39:12). If you are unable to exercise self-control before marriage, chances are you will not be able to control your desires afterwards. It is essential that all of God's children, whether or not they have a legitimate sexual outlet, learn to control their fleshly lusts.

For the single missionary who is separated from Christian family and friends to help hold him accountable, what will happen when no one else is around? Who will know? Remember the words of young Joseph: "*How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*" (Genesis 39:9). As far as the Lord is concerned, although sexual sin is abhorrent, it is no better or worse than other sins. As far as *people* are concerned, however, the ramifications of this sin make it worse than most others. Consider the impact such a transgression can have on your example and work. Nothing is done in secret. By renegeing on your commitment to faithfulness and purity, ". . . *you have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out*" (Numbers 32:23).

Just one mistake, particularly of a sexual nature, will not only damage your reputation and influence, but it has the potential of destroying your work and missionary career. Countless souls can be affected by a moment's indiscretion. That is why you must make a commitment to God and to yourself right now, long before you find yourself in a compromising situation, that running away from the temptation is the only option (2 Timothy 2:22). A missionary's position of influence demands that his life must be, as much as is humanly possible, above reproach (1 Timothy 4:12,16).

Jesus, being a flesh and blood human being (Hebrews 2:14, 17), was subject to every emotion and temptation known to man



(Luke 4:13). Jesus was single, and although we don't like to imagine it, sexual temptation was something he, too, faced (Hebrews 4:15). But Jesus never gave in. He completely submitted his will to the Father's will, he exercised self-control, he overcame these temptations, and he can therefore "*aid those who are tempted*" (Hebrews 2:18).

Paul was also a bachelor, and even though he understood that he had the right to have a wife (1 Corinthians 9:5), he forfeited that right for the kingdom's sake (Matthew 19:12; 1 Corinthians 7:7,8,32). Like you and me, Paul struggled with temptation (cf. Romans 7:8-24), but he disciplined himself daily (1 Corinthians 9:27) and conquered it (2 Timothy 4:6-8). After a lifetime of concentrated effort, he could confidently say: "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*" (Philippians 4:13).

Admittedly there are some who seem to be able to endure sexual temptation more easily than others (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:7-9), but there is no one who can legitimately say that it is unconquerable. Some have no choice but to remain celibate if they want to be faithful to the Lord (Matthew 19:9; Romans 7:3; 1 Corinthians 7:11). God is not so unfair that he would require us to "flee sexual immorality" and not give us the strength, ability, and opportunity to do so. The "*Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations . . .*" (2 Peter 2:9). Don't allow the devil to deceive you into thinking that you are too strong to ever yield to this sin or that you are too weak to ever control your desires. "*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it*" (1 Corinthians 10:12,13).

Common sense will also go a long way in helping to avoid sexual sin. Keep company with the right kind of people (1 Corinthians 15:33). Avoid situations where temptation is greater (Proverbs 5:8), such as being alone with the opposite sex, open displays of pornography, or places where people tend to dress immodestly. More often than not, sexual sin is the result of a gradual process rather than a sudden lapse (James 1:12-16). If you unwittingly find yourself faced with temptation, look for the door of escape and flee! Above all, keep yourself busy in the Lord's work. In Dominique Lapierre's book *The City of Joy*, Stephan Kovalski is reported as saying: "I noticed that it was always during periods of relaxation that temptation hit me hardest, and not during intervals of intense trial. It was always during a phase when my relationship with God was in some way impoverished that I was at my most vulnerable. If you don't find your joy in God, you seek it elsewhere" (p. 119).

What may seem impossible from a human perspective is not impossible with God (Matthew 19:26). Pray for the necessary strength to endure, because it is hard to do wrong when you are praying to do right (Luke 22:40,46). Regularly study God's word and keep it in your heart. "*Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You . . . Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way*" (Psalm 119:11,104).

### **Coping with Discouragement**

Discouragement is one of Satan's more subtle and destructive tools. With it he has halted many good works and has contributed to the depletion of our missionary force. A recent survey suggests that the average overseas missionary of the churches of

Christ has been on the mission field less than five years. Discouragement seems to be a major hindrance to long-term missionary commitments.

When I first began my work as a missionary, admittedly I was somewhat unrealistic in my expectations. I naively thought that everyone would be as excited about the message of Christ as I was. It didn't take long for resistance, rejection, hostility, and church problems to bring me face to face with reality. The temptation to quit was almost a daily encounter.

Jesus must have been well acquainted with discouragement. He, too, faced resistance, rejection, hostility, and problems. That is why he can sympathize with our weakness, having been "*tempted in all points as we are*" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus, however, never let discouragement get the best of him. He never quit. How can single missionaries, and all other Christians, be more like Christ in effectively dealing with and overcoming discouragement?

A primary defense against discouragement is a close relationship with God. No one can realistically conquer discouragement alone. Everyone needs a friend, and what better friend can one have than the Almighty? For a number of missionaries, especially single ones, he is the only one who will both listen and understand. Peter puts it this way: "*casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you*" (1 Peter 5:7). This is how Jesus seems to have been able to cope with his discouragements. Have you ever noticed how much time Jesus spent pouring his heart out to the heavenly Father? (Luke 5:16; 6:12; et al.). The best way to conquer anxiety and to have the peace of God guarding our heart and mind is through prayer (Philippians 4:6,7).

Another important ingredient is learning to be realistic. No matter how much we may wish it could be different, reality shows that most people are resistant to Christ's message (Matthew 7:13,14; Luke 8:4-15). Even Jesus did not convert everyone with whom he came in contact. Realizing this makes those positive responses even more encouraging. If you can do something about it, do it; if not, leave it in God's hands. Also remember that even when people become Christians they are still people, and people are imperfect, and imperfect people have and cause problems. Being realistic will not alleviate all the distress, but it will at least help keep things in perspective.

It is also important for the missionary to constantly remind himself of why he is here and why he is doing what he is doing. Am I here to please and to serve myself? Am I searching for a comfortable and easy life? A missionary's purpose is much greater than and extends far beyond self. There are people who depend on you, many of whom may have no hope if you allow discouragement to get you down. Take the word "quit" out of your vocabulary and never consider it a viable option. Be determined that Satan is not going to win!

If at all possible, don't try to struggle with discouragement alone. The Lord is never far away, and he has additional ears, hugs, and support in the form of fellow Christians. After extreme opposition had forced Paul to leave three successive preaching points and he had not been very successful in the fourth, he appears to have been less than enthused when he arrived in Corinth (1 Corinthians 2:3). But his spirit was bolstered when he was joined by Aquila, Priscilla, Silas and Timothy (Acts 18:2-5; cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:6-9) and he preached there longer than he had anywhere previously.

Nobody is able to avoid every discouragement in life, but with God's help it can be overcome. God can and will bring light out of darkness, hope out of despair, good out of evil, and even out of discouragement he can accomplish great things (Romans 8:28-39). *"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord"* (1 Corinthians 15:57,58).

# Chapter 13

## Counting the Cost

Jesus taught that in order to be his disciple one must first “*count the cost*,” and if the potential disciple is not willing to make a full commitment to the end, he shouldn’t even start (Luke 14:26-35). I believe the same principle also applies to prospective missionaries. If you venture into the mission field unprepared and unaware of what you’re getting into (i.e. not having “counted the cost”), you’re in for quite a shock. And if you do not possess the necessary determination, adaptability, and fortitude to stick it out and persevere, you will have wasted a lot of time, money, self-esteem, peace of mind, and dignity. Better to not even go at all than to unnecessarily renege on a solemn commitment.<sup>1</sup>

It is very important to have realistic expectations. Be sensibly aware that the missionary life is not always exciting, adventurous, satisfying, or even visibly productive. It seems glamorous to just about everybody except those on the mission field. It involves a lot of hard work, apprehension, frustration, and disappointment. Some will put the missionary up on a pedestal and laud his feeble efforts, making him feel uncomfortable and unworthy. Others, unaware of what it’s really like, will question his use of time and money and criticize his lack of results. Some will view him with disdain because he has forsaken loved ones to preach to foreigners when there are “needs” at home to be met. Certain ones will act uneasy around him because, in their view,

he is not a “regular Christian” but a hard-to-relate-to peculiarity, and conversations will tend to be awkward and one-sided. Once you step into those missionary shoes, your life will never be the same.

For those who are accustomed to having a parent, teacher or boss setting their schedule and standing over them with a list of chores, assignments or duties which are expected to be completed by a predetermined deadline, a rude awakening awaits on the mission field. More often than not, the missionary is responsible for organizing and implementing his own schedule. If he is not a self-starter and a self-motivator, he runs the risk of becoming lazy, disorganized, and ineffective. But if he is being supported to do the Lord’s work, he has a solemn obligation, both to God and to his supporters, to exercise good stewardship of his time and resources (1 Corinthians 9:16,17). Most conscientious missionaries tend to go to the opposite (workaholic) extreme, but if you feel that inefficiency may be a problem for you, start working to overcome it right now!<sup>2</sup>

While it is possible to be content in any situation in life (Philippians 4:11), this is not to say that a missionary will ever be fully satisfied. As long as he is on the mission field, there will be degrees of longing for family, friends, brethren, places, foods, events, and the cultural norms of home. And once he has adapted to his new environment and established new relationships, if he returns to his former homeland he will experience the same feelings in reverse. It is almost like a permanent state of homesickness, and few missionaries are ever completely satisfied on this side of eternity (cf. Philippians 1:8; 2:26; 2 Corinthians 11:28).

Culture shock, in varying degrees, is experienced by almost

all missionaries, whether half-way around the world or in a neighboring State. It is something to anticipate and be prepared for. I would suggest that no one should venture into the mission field without having studied missionary anthropology and cross-cultural adaptation and communication. The initial dream-world fascination inevitably gives way to misapprehension, irritation, and hostility, sometimes leading to bitterness, maladjustment, and even depression. For those who are unsuspecting and unprepared, culture shock can be a traumatic experience. It can also unwittingly transform a well-intentioned missionary into an "Ugly American," thus severely weakening his influence and the power of the gospel he seeks to convey.

Even more traumatic than culture shock, in my opinion, is what sociologists call "reverse culture shock." This is experienced when a person has been away from his native environment for a long period of time, having assimilated to a foreign culture, and then has trouble adjusting when he returns home. I believe this is worse than the initial culture shock because of the level of anticipation. One generally expects to feel out-of-place and to go through an adjustment period in a foreign culture, but not when he goes home. When he returns to his native land he is subconsciously looking for everything and everyone to be the same as when he left, and he expects to feel right at home. But it can be very confusing and disheartening when he doesn't feel at home. Everyone has changed, including himself. There have been deaths, marriages, graduations, divorces, births, and nothing is like it used to be. His nieces and nephews have grown up and barely remember him, his family and friends have gotten on with their lives without him, and he feels like he doesn't belong. What used to be "home" is now a strange and foreign environment. What has become normal and familiar to him on the mission field



now makes him feel awkward and out-of-place. He forgets what certain things are called, he unconsciously uses words and phrases that no one understands, he tells jokes that nobody gets, and he is frequently embarrassed and confused. Worst of all, nobody understands. He tries to explain these disconcerting feelings, but it is hard to put into words, and unless it has been personally experienced, it is an incomprehensible phenomenon. So instead of the relaxed, joyous feelings of home he had been anticipating, he struggles with insecurity and emotional isolation.

Another price to be paid in the adaptation process is the gradual emotional break from family and cultural ties. How does one cope with the pain of separation? For many, suppressing these uncomfortable feelings is the best way to survive. The problem is, after awhile these suppressed feelings get buried deep in the subconscious mind or disappear altogether, and what began as a coping mechanism becomes who you really are. Birthdays, holidays, and other special occasions come and go with no excitement, anticipation, or joy. Even when the missionary is able to be reunited with loved ones, the initial exuberance quickly fades and no one understands why he appears to be so distant or cynical.

Another potential struggle for the single missionary is the nagging feeling that he is missing out. His peers back home are getting married, having children, buying houses, getting normal "9 to 5" jobs, spending time with their families, watching their favorite sports, eating their favorite foods, and enjoying the comforts and luxuries of home.<sup>4</sup> The single missionary, on the other hand, has none of these things. He is not only spouseless, but anything that might resemble a social life is practically nonexistent. His day starts early and ends late, he is on call 24-hours a day, and people tend to be very demanding of his time. He lives

on a tight budget, his savings are minimal, and he has very little (of a material nature) to show for all his hard work.<sup>5</sup> He may begin to wonder if he has made a big mistake with his life.

Ironically, the longer one stays on the mission field, the more difficult it becomes to leave. Instead of “doing his time” and “getting it out of his system,” the missionary may very well find that the burden which brought him to the mission field in the first place has only grown stronger and is keeping him there. Being aware of a need is one thing, but to actually see it with one’s own eyes is another. It will change a person’s life forever.<sup>6</sup> Any thoughts of leaving make the missionary uneasy and heavy-hearted. And if he stays long enough, he may find that he cannot leave. Is this a price I’m willing to pay?

Now that some may be questioning whether the price is too great, let’s consider the alternative. What if you never become a missionary? What price is to be paid then? While being a missionary is unquestionably hard, I sincerely believe that **not** being a missionary is even harder. Keeping the gospel to yourself is like trying to hold a live coal in your hands. Admittedly, some have become so callused that it doesn’t bother them very much, if at all. However, if you have any appreciation for what the Lord has done for you and are the least bit concerned about the lost and dying world, how easy is it to sit idly by and do nothing? *“O my soul, my soul! I am pained in my very heart! My heart makes a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace . . . But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not”* (Jeremiah 4:19; 20:9b).<sup>7</sup>

On the other side of counting the cost are the dividends of your investment. I honestly feel sorry for those who allow their fears and doubts to hold them back and never get to experience

the extraordinary missionary life. I have met few missionaries who have regrets about what they have chosen to do. Surely one can stay home and avoid all the apprehension, anxiety, homesickness, frustration, culture shock, et al., but consider how very much will be forfeited.

Missionary work offers unique challenges that are hard to find in other professions, and consequently tremendous spiritual, mental, and emotional growth is inevitable.<sup>8</sup> It has been said that the strongest trees grow in the wind, and the apostle Paul was almost certainly the caliber of man he was because of his missionary experiences (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:7-18). It doesn't take a spiritual giant to become a missionary, but it is nearly impossible to remain spiritually dwarfed on the mission field. This honorable, worthwhile, and rewarding vocation is anything but dull, monotonous, or boring. It is challenging, character-building, and life-changing.

On the mission field the Bible seems to come to life in a more vivid way than in other environments. I have met several people in the course of my missionary work who have reminded me of characters I've read about in the Bible. It is so amazing to encounter a modern-day Cornelius or Lydia or Timothy and to see the word of God transform their lives before your very eyes. Working with people for whom the gospel is new, fresh, and exciting has great rewards. There are no preconceived misconceptions about "the church of Christ." Non-essential cultural baggage is more easily stripped away as the Bible is studied and applied afresh. Fundamentals are not taken for granted. Ethnic integration, a real family atmosphere among brethren, and even the inevitable problems are all reminiscent of the early days of Christianity.

Although “sacrifice” is viewed by many as a dirty word and as something to be avoided if at all possible, it tends to be blown way out of proportion. We live in a society that stresses comfort, security, convenience, luxury, and the accumulation of material things. People want to be happy and feel good, but they don’t want to give, be inconvenienced, or make sacrifices. That’s why so many end up miserable and discontent. Yet sacrifice is an integral part of being a Christian (Romans 12:1), and this is not because the Lord wants us to lose out on anything advantageous — to the contrary.

Those who tend to emphasize the sacrificial aspect of missionary work are usually the ones who have never done it. But often what may initially look like a sacrifice or a hardship turns out to be a doorway into a life of tremendous blessings (cf. Mark 10:30; Luke 9:24). While God is not primarily interested in our comfort and convenience, he is interested in blessing people through us, and consequently blessing us in the process. As a missionary I in no way feel slighted or deprived. I actually feel bad for those who have not had the same opportunities and experiences that I have been privileged to have. Any so-called sacrifices fade into insignificance when compared to things like close friendships around the world, souls won to Christ and headed for heaven, established and growing churches, new cultures, exotic foods, breath-taking scenery, and a multitude of priceless memories. To experience God working in your life and in the lives of those around you puts the concept of “sacrifice” into a whole new perspective. You never have to be afraid of God or of what he will do if you unreservedly put your life into his hands.

To be a missionary or not to be a missionary, that is the question. There is a price to be paid either way. Wanting to make a

difference in this world is a noble pursuit, but how much greater is the aim of making a difference *in eternity*. With the Lord's help, the potential impact you can make, along with all others who are willing to take up the challenge, is unfathomable. *"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest"* (Luke 10:2).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This does not suggest that it is always undignified for a missionary to leave the field before his commitment is fulfilled. Sometimes there are extenuating circumstances, such as illness, family emergencies, civil unrest, loss of support, etc., that warrant premature departure. However, this is not the same as giving up because of misplaced expectations or lack of preparation.

<sup>2</sup>“Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest” (Proverbs 6:6-8).

<sup>3</sup>Recommended reading: William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick’s *The Ugly American*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1958.

<sup>4</sup>In addition are the plethora opportunities for spiritual nourishment, i.e. lectureships, gospel meetings, seminars, brotherhood literature, etc., which are not as readily available (if at all) for the missionary.

<sup>5</sup>However, compare 2 Corinthians 6:10; 8:9.

<sup>6</sup>J. C. Choate writes, “we’ve been, we’ve seen, we know, and we cannot live before God in good conscience unless we act on our knowledge” (*Giving Ourselves to the Lord*, p. 71).

<sup>7</sup>Joe Ellis relates the story of a Coast Guard crew called to an emergency at sea on a stormy night. To an anxious recruit who was having reservations, the captain replied, “There are men who will die out there if we don’t go. We are not required to get back, but we must go” (*The Personal Evangelist*, p. 15). See also 2 Kings 7:9; 1 Corinthians 9:16.

<sup>8</sup>In the October 15, 1993 issue of *Banner of Truth* (Walter W. Pigg, editor), there was an article by Justin Adams entitled, “Growing Up on the Mission Field,” about living in Taiwan as a missionary’s kid. While I can’t relate very much to the article itself, having been raised as a preacher’s kid in West Tennessee, I can certainly relate to the title. At the age of twenty-five I first came to New Zealand as a naive, relatively inexperienced evangelist. Over the years I can honestly say that I have “grown up” on the mission field!

# Appendix

## Sermons on World Evangelism

The following sermons contain very little original material. Over the years I have been influenced by countless people, lectures, sermons, books, articles, classes, and discussions, all of which have contributed to the formulation of these lessons. Because of my inability to document all the sources, I must simply make this general acknowledgment. Men such as Earl Edwards, Rod Rutherford, Bill Nicks, J.C. Choate, and others have made significant contributions, along with some of the sources listed in the Bibliography. The highest recognition, of course, goes to God, who authored the Book upon which each of these sermons is based.

# The Bible and World Evangelism

Text: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

## Introduction:

The commitment of individuals and congregations to world evangelism is dependent on the degree of their conviction about the authority of the Bible. When people lose confidence in the Bible, the zeal for sharing the gospel is also lost. In contrast, when one is convinced about the Bible, evangelism is an automatic response. The Bible gives us at least four things to evangelize the world.

## Discussion:

### I. The Mandate for World Evangelism

It is not just the “Great Commission” that sets forth this mandate, but the entire biblical revelation. God is always sending, and sometimes even going himself, to ensure the redemption of lost humanity. When Adam and Eve sinned, God went looking for them, and then promised to send a Savior into the world (Genesis 3:9,15). God commanded Abram, “*Leave your country, your family, and your father’s house, to a land that I will show you,*” and then promised that in him “*shall all families of the earth be blessed*” (Genesis 12:1-3). “*By faith Abraham obeyed...*” (Hebrews 11:8,9). God sent Joseph to Egypt to be a “cross-cultural missionary” (so to speak) and to play a significant role in the overall divine plan (Genesis 45:5-8). God sent Moses to lead his people out of bondage to the promised land (Exodus 3:12). God sent Jonah to Nineveh (Jonah 1:1,2). God is always reaching out to bring his rebellious people back to himself (Isaiah



65:2). *“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son . . .”* (Galatians 4:4). Jesus said to his disciples: *“As the Father has sent Me, I also send you”* (John 20:21). He sent them into all the world to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). The early disciples took this mandate seriously (Acts 5:42; 8:4; 13:49; et al.).

## II. The **Message** for World Evangelism

*“Go into all the world and preach the gospel . . .”* (Mark 16:15). The gospel is “good news.” The bad news is that the world is lost in sin (Isaiah 59:2; Romans 3:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9). The Good News is that God still loves the world and has offered salvation through Christ (1 Timothy 2:3,4; John 3:16; Romans 5:6-8). Salvation is possible only by responding in obedient faith to Christ and his gospel (Romans 6:16-18; Acts 2:38-47). This message must be preached to the world! (Galatians 1:8,9).

## III. The **Model** for World Evangelism

The greatest expression of God’s desire to communicate his love to us is Jesus. Jesus came to reveal God to man (John 1:14,18). He went to extreme lengths in order to save us (Philippians 2:5-8). He is the supreme example of missionary identification (Hebrews 2:11-17; 4:15). Jesus, who emptied and humbled himself, is our model for evangelism. Our purpose is not to “Americanize” the world, but to evangelize the world. We must be willing to sacrifice time, cultural preferences, convenience, and comfort to more effectively communicate this message. I must be ready to *“become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some”* (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

## IV. The **Means** for World Evangelism

This enormous task could not be fulfilled if it solely depended on you and me. *“With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible”* (Matthew 19:26). By our own power we can convert no one (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). The power is in the word of God (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12). We are God’s tools for bringing souls in contact with his word (2 Corinthians 4:1-7). The reason more people throughout the world have not been won to Christ is not because the word lacks power, but because most of us have been negligent in *“holding forth the word of life”* (Philippians 2:16).

### **Conclusion:**

To evangelize the world, the Bible gives us: (1) The Mandate — it is not optional; it is the God-given responsibility of us all. (2) The Message — not the opinions, philosophies, and doctrines of men, but the gospel message of a lost humanity, of a Savior who loves and died for the world, and of everyone’s need to trust and obey. (3) The Model — emptying, denying, and humbling ourselves to more effectively reach those we claim to serve. (4) The Means — not human wisdom and might, but the power of God’s living word. What are you doing to evangelize your community, your country, and your world?

# Motivation for World Evangelism

Text: Matthew 28:18-20

## Introduction:

What motivates you to do the things you do? Work? Study? Exercise? Relationships? What should be the motivation that compels one to share Christ with others? Let's consider four motivational factors.

## Discussion:

### I. The Commission

The Bible makes a distinction between optional matters and what God requires. Optional: eating meat (Romans 14), circumcision (1 Corinthians 7:19), place of assemblies (Hebrews 10:25), etc. Not optional: baptism (Acts 10:48), communion (1 Corinthians 11:23 ff.), worship (John 4:24), etc. *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome"* (1 John 5:3).

Evangelism is not an optional matter. Being evangelistically-minded and being involved in evangelism (in some way) is just as much a part of being a Christian as partaking of the Lord's supper every Sunday. I don't know where we ever got the idea that evangelism is just a sideline or something we can choose to either do or not do.

The Imperatives of the Great Commission. In Matthew 28:19-20 the imperative is: *"make disciples of all nations"* by the process of baptizing and teaching. In Mark 16:15 the imperative is: *"preach the gospel to every creature."* To whom do these

imperatives apply? To all who become disciples of Jesus (Matthew 28:20; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17,18).

While the Commission itself ought to be enough, if our only motivation is to obey a command, we will probably not be very effective in accomplishing our task.

## **II. The Conviction**

Christ's command may get us started, but it's probably not enough to keep us going. There is little evidence that the command of Jesus was the decisive motivation for evangelism in the first century. In Acts, if the commission was all that motivated them, it seems they would have left Jerusalem much sooner. After persecution drove them out, they went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4).

The primary motivation must be internal (cf. Acts 4:18-20; 5:28,29). Paul had an inner compulsion to preach the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16-23). The love of Christ has a constraining power (2 Corinthians 5:14). Even if Christ had never given the command, the hearts of Christians convicted by the message of Christ should compel them to reach out to others.

## **III. The Compassion**

The world is lost without Christ, and we have the message of salvation. We need to be reminded of the reality of judgment and hell. The Bible is filled with warnings (e.g. 2 Corinthians 5:10; Matthew 25:31-40). But some of us live as though we don't believe in hell or that anyone is going there. We ought to remember what it means to be lost. If you were without Christ, wouldn't you want someone to share the Good News with you? Remember the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12; cf. James 2:8; 1 John

4:20). It was compassion for the souls of men that brought Jesus to the world (Luke 19:10).

#### **IV. The Christ**

Jesus Christ is the sole basis for evangelism. To say that you believe in Jesus and that he is your Lord is the same as saying that you are personally bound to a life of self-giving, self-sacrifice, and outreach. Christ dwells within everyone who has responded to him in obedient faith (Ephesians 3:17; Galatians 2:20), and he brings with him the burden of a lost world. If that burden can't fit into your heart, then Christ can't come in. To be like Christ (Philippians 2:5) is to be soul conscious.

#### **Conclusion:**

Soul-winning is inherent in the very nature of Christianity. It is not an option or a sideline. It is not merely a work of the church, but *the* work of the church. To keep this a primary task in our hearts and lives, let's be motivated by the Commission, the Conviction, the Compassion, and the Christ.

# The Call to World Evangelism

**Text: Matthew 9:37-38**

## **Introduction:**

Each one who has obeyed the gospel and has been forgiven of past sins has the hope of eternal life because of the sacrifices of others. Someone took the time and made the effort to teach each of us the truth. Many men and women in past generations sacrificed a great deal to copy, translate, and preserve the word of God. The apostles and many early Christians suffered brutal deaths as martyrs in carrying out the Lord's will. The greatest sacrifice made for you and me was that of Jesus (Romans 5:6-8). Now that we enjoy every spiritual blessing, what should our response be to those less fortunate than ourselves who have never had the opportunity to hear the saving truth?

## **Discussion:**

### **I. The Need for World Evangelism**

A. **Personal Need.** The church of Christ will not grow and prosper unless we show concern for the lost and seek to save them according to God's will. When our attention is focused on ourselves, problems arise. When our focus is beyond ourselves, blessings arise (Luke 6:38; Philippians 4:15-19). In order to grow and prosper as individual Christians, we must be evangelistically minded. Matthew 6:33 will be in our Bibles until Jesus comes again. Submission to the will of God necessitates that we observe all that Jesus commanded, including the evangelization of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20).

B. **Universal Need.** What are we doing to reach the over six

billion people of this world with the gospel? Out of approximately 50,000 religious missionaries in the world, churches of Christ presently have just over a thousand outside the USA where 94% of the world's population lives. There is a gross imbalance in the church. An army can't win a war if only 10% of its soldiers are fighting. Until we restore the zeal and dedication of the first-century Christians, we are not going to take the world for Christ.

## **II. The Restoration of World Evangelism**

There are a number of reasons why we're not evangelizing as we should: indifference, self-centeredness, too money conscious, lack of proper motivation. Probably the two greatest reasons are: (1) We don't believe the world is lost without the gospel, and (2) we don't believe we are lost if we don't take the gospel to them. To be saved, God has not given us an option as to whether or not we obey his will, including world evangelization (Matthew 28:18-20; Hebrews 5:9).

The true NT church must follow the NT pattern and possess the identifying characteristics set forth in the NT. If a church possesses many of these identifying characteristics but wears a denominational name, does not worship scripturally, and teaches things contrary to the doctrine of Christ, is this truly the church of Christ? If a church does not evangelize, is this truly the church of Christ?

## **III. The Motivation for World Evangelism**

God said to do it, and disobeying this command is no different than disobeying any other (Luke 6:46). Being aware of the tremendous need in the world ought to move us to take action (Matthew 7:12; 22:39). When we bear much fruit and when men

confess Jesus as Lord, God is glorified (John 15:8; Philippians 2:11). Probably the greatest incentive for world evangelism is LOVE. Our love for the Lord compels us to evangelize (1 John 4:19; 2 Corinthians 5:14). Our love for the souls of men compels us to evangelize (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

#### **IV. The Urgency of World Evangelism**

Time is valuable and is running out (James 4:14; Ephesians 5:15,16). Jesus may come back at any time (Matthew 24:42); will he find us fulfilling his commission to evangelize the world? Life is uncertain. Have we used our talents and resources to take the gospel to the world? (Matthew 25:14-30). Fifty million people die each year, one every 21 seconds, most of whom are lost without Christ. What are we doing right now to take the world for Christ?

#### **Conclusion:**

There is a real need for world evangelism: "Untold millions are yet untold." World evangelism is essential to the restoration of NT Christianity. Among several other things, our love for the Lord and for the souls of men ought to motivate us to take action. The task is urgent: Yesterday is gone forever, tomorrow may never come, but today is in our hands.



# Using Opportunities to Evangelize

Text: Mark 16:15-16

## Introduction:

The ancient Greeks described “opportunity” as a bald-headed lady with a forelock — if you took hold of the forelock while she was coming toward you, there was something to hold on to, but if you waited until she had passed by, there was nothing left to grasp. Most opportunities come by only once, and to refuse to use them is to lose them forever. Today we have opportunities to evangelize the world like no other generation. We must use our opportunities to evangelize for the following reasons.

## Discussion:

### I. Because Mankind Is Lost

There are over six billion people in the world, most of whom are outside the body of Christ. People are lost because of sin (Romans 3:23; 6:23), and Jesus is the only one who can save them (Acts 4:12). Without obedience to the gospel, sinners cannot be saved (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

The Lord doesn't want anyone to be lost (2 Peter 3:9) and he has implemented a plan to offer salvation to the world (Matthew 28:18-20). We play a significant role in that plan, but we must be moved by the lost condition of man. Foy Smith told the story of a preacher weeping over lost souls and one of the members tried to console him by saying, “Don't worry, you'll get over it.” The preacher replied, “I know, that's why I'm crying.”

### II. Because We Have the Message of Salvation

Man cannot be saved in his ignorance (John 8:24), in any

way he chooses (Jeremiah 10:23), or without doing what God says the way God says to do it (Matthew 7:21-23). God has chosen to save those who obey the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16; 6:16-18). Those of us who have access to the gospel and have been reconciled to God are responsible for sharing it with others (2 Corinthians 4:7; 5:19). If we don't proclaim the gospel, no one else will (Romans 10:13-15; Acts 20:26,27).

### **III. Because Evangelism Is Not an Option**

If we want to be saved, the Lord does not give us an option as to whether or not we obey him. He doesn't say we can choose to repent or not repent and then expect to be saved either way (Acts 17:30). He doesn't say we can acceptably worship him any way we please (John 4:24). He doesn't say we can choose to evangelize or not (Mark 16:15). In order to completely restore the church of the NT, we must restore the zeal for preaching the gospel to the lost (cf. Acts 5:42; 8:4; 13:49).

### **IV. Because Time Is Running Out**

Yesterday is gone forever and the opportunities we had in the past will never come our way again. Tomorrow may never come. Life is short and uncertain (James 4:14), and Jesus may return at any time (Matthew 24:42,44). But today's opportunities are available to us right now (Ephesians 5:15,16).

### **Conclusion:**

Opportunities to evangelize are all around us, and to shirk them is to lose them forever. We must use the opportunities we have to take the gospel to the world because: (1) Mankind is lost, (2) We have the message of salvation, (3) Evangelism is not an option, and (4) Time is running out. May the Lord help us all to be more diligent in our task.

# The Cross of Christ: The Focus of World Evangelism

**Text: 1 Corinthians 2:2**

## **Introduction:**

What motivated Paul to endure hardship, danger, and persecution to reach the lost with the gospel? It's not because he was extraordinarily brave (1 Corinthians 2:3). It's not because he was exceptionally talented (1 Corinthians 2:1,4). It had nothing to do with his supernatural abilities; often the miracles led to more trouble (cf. Acts 14:8-19). There was something beyond himself that drove him — namely the cross of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:2). What is it about Christ's death on the cross that is so compelling?

## **Discussion:**

### **I. The Cross Climaxes the Mission of Christ**

Jesus came for the express purpose of seeking and saving the lost (Luke 19:10). He became the supreme example of missionary identification. He gave up everything and became one of us in order to save us (Philippians 2:5-7). His love led him to extreme lengths, "*even the death of the cross*" (Philippians 2:8).

### **II. The Cross Reflects Some Things About Us**

In the cross we see the magnitude of our sinfulness. Jesus died for our sins (1 Timothy 1:15). Jesus died even though we are unworthy (Romans 5:6-8). In the cross we see the magnitude of Christ's love. The greatest expression of love was the death of Jesus (John 15:13). Jesus didn't have to die, but freely gave his

life for us (Galatians 1:4). Who am I that Jesus would die for me?!

### **III. The Cross Compels Us to Share Christ with Others**

The love of Christ, manifested in the cross, compels us (2 Corinthians 5:14,15). When we put on Christ in baptism, not only do we dwell in him, but he dwells in us (Galatians 2:20; 3:27). To have this relationship with Christ means that we have been crucified with him (Galatians 2:20). In the cross we learn of self-denial, self-sacrifice, and the burden of a lost humanity. How can Jesus dwell within us unless we make room for that burden?

The cross motivates us to: leave family, homes, and lands (Matthew 10:29); become all things to all men (1 Corinthians 9:22); deny self-interests and selfish desires (Luke 9:23; 14:26,27); go into all the world (Mark 16:15) to share Jesus Christ and him crucified.

#### **Conclusion:**

The cross of Christ is the focus of and the motivating factor behind world evangelism. In the cross we see the mission of Christ fulfilled, the magnitude of our sins, the enormity of Christ's love, and the motivation for proclaiming Christ to the world.

# Fishers of Men

**Text: Matthew 4:18-20**

## **Introduction:**

As Jesus began his earthly ministry, he chose 12 men who would one day carry on his divine mission on earth. What kind of men would be most suited for this enormous responsibility? In our text, what can we learn from the account of the first men Jesus called?

## **Discussion:**

### **I. The Call**

A. The Source of the Call. Jesus himself called these men. Jesus continues to call us today through the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14).

B. The Contents of the Call. 1. To follow Jesus. This must always come first; those who preach Christ must first follow him (Matthew 11:28-30). The Lord shows us by example how to live and teach (1 John 2:6). 2. To be fishers of men. Peter and Andrew had no reason to boast or to be afraid of the unknown — they were still fishermen. The major difference between fishing for fish and “fishing” for men is that fish are alive until you catch them, whereas men are dead and then made alive (Colossians 2:13).

C. The Recipients of the Call. 1. They were brothers. Their physical ties, however, were to be superseded by their spiritual relationship (Mark 10:28-30). All who follow Jesus are members of his spiritual family (Matthew 12:48-50). 2. They were hard-

working men. There is no room for lazy or idle people (2 Thessalonians 3:10). While the nature of the work certainly changes, the work ethic does not (Colossians 1:10). 3. They were accustomed to hardships. Being fishers by trade, they were familiar with the cold, wet, toil, and danger. Being a follower of Jesus does not alleviate hardships (2 Timothy 3:12).

## **II. The Response to the Call**

A. Its Promptness. They immediately left their nets and followed Jesus. There is no time for excuses or delay (Luke 10:2; 2 Corinthians 6:2).

B. Its Absoluteness. They left all (cf. Mark 10:28). Nothing should be more important than following Jesus (Matthew 16:24).

C. Its Action. They didn't just make a verbal pledge, they actually did something about it. Christianity is a life of active service (James 1:22-25).

### **Conclusion:**

Having considered the call of Jesus' first disciples and their response, what have we learned? Jesus is still calling us to follow him and to be fishers of men. Will we respond in the same way that Peter and Andrew did? It is hypocritical for one to call himself a "fisherman" if all he does is talk about fishing but never does it! Let us not profess to be something that we are not, but let us faithfully respond to the call of our Lord: "*Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.*"

# The Call of Isaiah

**Text: Isaiah 6:1-13**

## **Introduction:**

Isaiah is among the great Old Testament prophets. His name means “Jehovah is Salvation.” He was called to be a prophet in about 740 BC. As his call is examined, what implications are there for God’s people today?

## **Discussion:**

### **I. God’s Majesty (vs. 1-5)**

A. The greatness of God (vs. 1-3). “*High and lifted up*”; “*Holy, holy, holy*”; God’s glory filled the earth.

B. The condition of man before God (vs. 4-5). While God is high and lifted up, man is lowly (Romans 9:20). God is holy, but man is unclean (Romans 3:10). God is glorious, but man falls short of his glory (Romans 3:23).

### **II. God’s Grace (vs. 6-7).**

A. We are unworthy to be in God’s presence (Psalm 5:4,5; Isaiah 59:2).

B. God has given us a second chance (Romans 5:8; Acts 2:38; 1 John 1:7-9).

C. But with these blessings come responsibility.

### **III. God’s Expectation (vs. 8-13).**

A. The Need (v. 8a): “*Whom shall I send . . . ?*” (Luke 10:2).

B. The Response (v. 8b): “*Here am I! Send me.*” (Romans 1:14-16).

C. The Task (v. 9a): “Go and tell . . .” (Mark 16:15).

D. The Obstacle (vs. 9-10): stubborn, unreceptive hearers (Luke 8:4-18; Matthew 7:13).

E. The Duration (vs. 11-12): “How long?” (Matthew 28:20; 2 Peter 3:9).

F. The Hope (v. 13): a righteous remnant (Matthew 7:14).

### **Conclusion:**

From the sixth chapter of Isaiah we learn of: (1) God’s majesty and our unworthiness before him; (2) God’s grace and his willingness to forgive and to reconcile, and (3) God’s expectation and his call for those who will respond to the need. May our response correspond to the obedient faith of Isaiah.



# The Chosen Servant of the Gentiles

Text: Isaiah 42:1-7

## Introduction:

The word “servant” occurs some 24 times in Isaiah but doesn’t always have the same application. In chapters 42-53 a Servant is described who is quite distinct from all others, later identified as Jesus the Christ (Matthew 12:15-21). The term “servant” is also applied to the nation of Israel (41:8) and to the church [spiritual Israel] (62:1-3; 65:15). In this lesson we will compare these “servants” from the three-fold perspective of their mission, the manner in which their mission was approached, and the means by which their mission was carried out.

## I. The Mission of Each Servant

A. The mission of Jesus (Isaiah 42:1-7): (1) To bring forth God’s system of justice in the new covenant (cf. Hebrews 8:6; 9:15); (2) To offer spiritual deliverance (cf. Luke 19:10; Hebrews 2:17); (3) To extend this even to the Gentiles (cf. Matthew 28:19).

B. The mission of Israel: (1) To be God’s witnesses (Isaiah 43:10-12; 44:8) to the nations (Psalm 145:12); (2) To let all the peoples of the earth know that Jehovah is God (1 Kings 8:60); (3) To be “*a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*” (Exodus 19:5-6).

C. The mission of the church: (1) To be a holy priesthood and “*proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*” (1 Peter 2:5-10); (2) To go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15); (3) To make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20).

## **II. The Manner of Each Servant**

A. The manner of Jesus (Isaiah 42:2,3): (1) Humility and gentleness (Matthew 11:29; Philippians 2:7,8); (2) Compassion and love (1 John 3:16); (3) Unyielding commitment (John 5:30; 17:4).

B. The manner of Israel: (1) Reluctance, rebellion, and resentment (Jonah 1:1-4:11); (2) Prejudice and fear (John 4:9; Acts 10:28); (3) Hatred and unconcern (Romans 2:24).

C. The manner of the church: (1) Humility and gentleness (2 Timothy 2:24,25); (2) Compassion and love (Philippians 2:3,4); (3) Unyielding commitment (1 Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10).

## **III. The Means Utilized by Each Servant**

A. The means utilized by Jesus (Isaiah 42:1, 6): (1) He trusted in and relied on the heavenly Father (Matthew 27:43; Acts 10:38); (2) He sought to do God's will rather than his own (John 5:30; 6:38); (3) He prayed often and fervently (Luke 5:16; 6:12).

B. The means utilized by Israel: (1) God's law was neglected and disobeyed (2 Kings 22:13); (2) God's prophets were persecuted and killed (Matthew 23:29-37); (3) The commandment of God was superseded by human innovations (Matthew 15:3-9).

C. The means to be utilized by the church: (1) Not faith in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:5); (2) Regular and fervent prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:1); (3) The word of God (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12).

### **Conclusion:**

What kind of servants are we? Will our mission be fulfilled? In what manner and by which means will it be undertaken? If we

are like the Jews of old, our mission will be approached with reluctance, discrimination, and indifference, and the means at our disposal will be neglected and discarded. Thomas Carlyle wrote: "And Jonah stalked to his shaded seat and waited for God to come around to his way of thinking. And God is still waiting for a host of Jonahs in their comfortable houses to come around to his way of loving." May God help us to be servants like Jesus and pursue our mission with obedient zeal, in a Christ-like manner, utilizing the powerful means that God has made available to us.

# Looking to the Future in World Missions

**Text: Proverbs 19:21**

## **Introduction:**

As we look to the future in world missions, planning is necessary to ensure the success of our efforts. But if our plans are based on human wisdom, we are destined to fail. *“Commit your works to the Lord, and your plans will be established”* (Proverbs 16:3). As we consider the future in world missions, it is important to first look to the past (Jeremiah 6:16).

## **Discussion:**

### **I. We Must Look Back:**

A. To the Bible. The Lord’s mission extends back far beyond “the Great Commission.” It is rooted in the very nature of God, who has worked throughout human history to ensure the redemption of mankind (Genesis 3:15; 12:1-3; Isaiah 65:2). When the time was right God sent forth his Son (Galatians 4:4) who in turn sent his followers into all the world (Mark 16:15). The early disciples took this commission seriously (Acts 5:42; 8:4).

B. To Past Successes. The period following WWII was the time of greatest missionary expansion among the churches of Christ over the last 150 years. During WWII Christian soldiers were stationed in parts of the world where the church did not exist. Some returned as missionaries or encouraged others to go. This thrust lasted until the Vietnam War made it unpopular for the

US to become involved in the affairs of other countries. North American churches began to turn inward. The number of overseas missionaries underwent a marked decline.

C. To Past Failures. Materialism: US churches of Christ are wealthier than ever before, but most of this money is not being used for world evangelism (cf. Philippians 3:19). This inward turn has led to fighting amongst brethren, elaborate buildings, ministerial professionalism. Parents are wanting their children to stay close to home and make lots of money. Love of life, country, family, and comfort keeps us from evangelizing the world.

## **II. As We Look to the Future:**

A. We Need a Renewed Commitment: (1) To Christ — share his compassion for the lost (Philippians 2:5); (2) To Christ's church — a commitment to her soundness and growth (Acts 2:47); (3) To the Great Commission (Luke 6:46).

B. We Need a Realistic View of Missionaries. Many never consider doing missionary work because they have an unrealistic view of missionaries. Missionaries are ordinary people like all other Christians (1 Corinthians 2:1-3). A lot more of us could be doing missionary work than are currently trying.

C. We Need a Realistic View of our Mission. The Lord is the source of this mission — it is not merely a human endeavor (Matthew 28:18-20). God will be with his people and equip us for the task (Matthew 19:26). This mission must never be undertaken for self-glorification, but for the glory of God (1 Peter 2:9). Carrying out this mission involves sacrifice for every Christian (Romans 12:1). Because the mission is the Lord's, it will succeed (1 Corinthians 15:58).

## **Conclusion:**

As we look to the future in world missions, we must first look back: to the Bible, to past successes, and to past failures, and learn from them. We must be looking to the future with renewed commitment and a realistic view of missionaries and the mission that has been placed in our hands. With the Lord on our side, the future looks bright for accomplishing this noble task!

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