

Preparing for Mission

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Doctors, lawyers, engineers and other skilled people prepare themselves with care for the vital work they are called to do. A gospel missionary – an ambassador for Christ – should expect to prepare just as carefully for the great task entrusted to him or her by the Lord of all creation. There are character strengths and social skills to acquire, languages to learn, cultures to assess, and scriptures to understand and teach.

Preparing for mission is an exciting challenge and a fascinating one but not at all easy. It requires all the intelligence and spiritual maturity you can bring to it. As you do, the Lord himself will be your teacher through his written word, by his Holy Spirit, and through experienced missionaries whose tactful advice may save each of us from unforeseen mistakes and heartaches and help us achieve what our Lord has prepared for us to do.

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Missionary Guidance

The call to mission

First of all we must consider what the New Testament says about the appointment of missionaries. Some things are clear from scripture:

1. Only a small number are called to be missionaries.

Jesus commissioned his eleven disciples to make disciples, and to teach their disciples to make disciples. From that time onwards, every believer is called to make disciples.

But from among his many disciples, Jesus chose only twelve to be called “apostles” and trained as missionaries (Mk 3:14).

When he sent out the Seventy-two, he told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest” (Lk 10:2). For such a great task, seventy-two were considered “few” – they were not enough. There was more work to be done than labourers to do it.

But Jesus did not send out all who believed in him, or all who wanted to go. He did not make it an obligation, and he did not ask for volunteers. The workers were given in answer to prayer. They were special people, suitable, prepared for service, and ready to go.

We see the same thing in the work of Paul. He had many converts but only a small number were invited to join his missionary team for training and for service in distant lands. They were believers skilled at proclamation, experienced in discipling, free to travel long distances and physically capable of enduring hardship. It was a special privilege, requiring them to live by faith, seeking their Lord for their daily guidance and daily bread.

2. Every fellowship should send missionaries.

When disciples are gathered into fellowships, each disciple will contribute something for the benefit of all. Among them will be found a variety of spiritual gifts, each contributing to the growth of the body of Christ.

As the New Testament lists these spiritual gifts, the first to be mentioned is always the gift of apostleship. It is the highest gift, the most important gift, and we are urged to seek earnestly the highest gifts (Eph 4:11-12; 1 Cor 12:28-31).

Not everyone in the fellowship will be an apostle (a pioneer missionary), but some will receive this gift from the Lord. It is a gift to the body of Christ, his Church. When this is understood and recognised, the believers will want to send out those who are gifted in this way so they can accomplish the apostolic task entrusted to them by the Lord.

3. Missionaries should be highly honoured.

To be faithful as a pioneer missionary is not easy. No one should attempt it without being certain of the Lord’s leading and blessing. Before starting out, be sure to count the cost. Gain experience of serving the Lord at home and on short-term missions to see if you have the faith, the ability, and the discipline to succeed.

One who did so was Epaphroditus. He left the comforts of his home to support Paul’s testimony in the courtroom and prison far away. Paul called him “my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier.” And Paul said, “Honour such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his

life” (Phil 2:29-30). Aquila and Priscilla also endangered their lives, as did Paul himself and Barnabas. They were deeply loved and respected for this reason (Rom 16:3-4; Acts 15:25-26).

Our missionaries should never have cause to doubt our love, respect and support for them in the hardships and difficulties they face.

So we learn from the New Testament that all believers are called to make disciples, that some disciples are called to apostolic mission, and that all should honour such pioneer missionaries who endure hardship as they carry the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Starting in mission

The decision to become a cross-cultural missionary is not to be taken lightly or in haste. It is a wonderful thing for a man or woman to be an ambassador for Christ, and if it is his will there are many ways he can make it clear and so confirm the decision.

Pray much about it – on your own and with trusted friends – and depend on him to guide you (Ps 32:8; 37:23).

Learn all you can about gospel outreach in other countries and cultures. If your interest continues to grow, the Lord may be confirming his purpose for you. Then it will be time to...

1. Gain some missionary experience.

In most cases, the best way to start in mission is when a senior missionary invites you to help in a work already under way. There is nothing better than watching a person in action who is skilled, experienced and effective in gospel outreach. The Twelve and the Seventy-two learned much from Jesus. Timothy, Titus and other young men learned much from Paul.

You might also find some immigrants living near you. Make friends with them, share your testimony and explain the gospel. Offer them scriptures, tracts or recordings in their own language. See if you have a gift for evangelism, pastoral care or teaching among them. Discover what kind of work might suit you best.

If there are short-term missions organised by your church or by a mission society, see if you might take part. Or ask a missionary if they would be willing for you to visit them and see what they are doing. They may benefit from your help just as you benefit from their experience and advice.

2. Gain the support of your church.

It is good to be sent by the Holy Spirit and the church. Paul and Barnabas were sent out by both. As they were engaged with their local fellowship in

serving the Lord, “the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’” (Acts 13:2).

If the Lord has led a company of believers to send you out, you may be sure he will then lead them often to pray for you. They will also be glad to hear your news and offer encouragement and support (Acts 14:26-27).

3. Gain assurance from the Lord.

It is the Lord of the harvest who sends labourers into his harvest (Lk 10:2). Paul’s mission to the Gentiles was not his own idea or that of his family or his church. He believed he was set apart before birth for this unique work (Gal 1:15). At the right time it was revealed to him by his Master. First came his vision on the Damascus road. Then step by step he followed instructions, till the moment came when Jesus said, “Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21). The Lord had a plan for Paul’s life and revealed it gradually to Paul himself (Gal 1:15-2:10).

Every pioneer missionary should have this sense of personal calling. It may not be so dramatic as it was for Paul, but it will give you strength to persevere when circumstances are difficult or discouraging. It will help you do what you believe to be right, even when other people think differently.

This does not mean separating yourself from others, or proudly insisting on your own way. In due course we will see how a pioneer missionary, called by God, may greatly benefit from fellowship with godly co-workers, with an experienced mission society and a supportive home church.

Deciding where to go and what to do

Jesus said, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel *to the whole creation*” (Mk 16:15), but how can I know which specific place I myself should go to? Paul said, “Be fervent in spirit, *serve the Lord*” (Rom 12:11), but what particular service should I undertake for him?

To start with, some quite obvious things may influence your decision:

- If a senior missionary invites you to join him or her, you will naturally go where they go, or where they send you. So Tychicus, Titus and Timothy each went with Paul until he sent them somewhere else.
- If a mission society appoints you to a particular place or task, you will normally be happy to accept it.
- If you have already gone on a short-term mission and enjoyed working in that place, you may decide it is the place for you.
- You might become aware of a people-group in spiritual darkness or physical crisis, and for that reason decide to go there.
- You may desire to find a completely unreached place or people-group. If so, you may need to do some research:

- research on the ground (e.g. CAPRO reports in Nigeria)
- research in magazines and books (e.g. Operation World)
- research on the internet (e.g. Joshua Project at www.joshuaproject.net)
- research with immigrants (asking where they come from, enquiring if there are any Christians there).

You may discover that there are 3 unreached people-groups in Zambia, 20 in Ethiopia, 26 in Britain, 70 in Nigeria and 2,500 in India. You will see 240 million Bengali, 40 million Fulani, 30 million Kurdish people... all ignorant of Christ. In this way you can find out exactly where they are and identify their basic beliefs and probable felt-needs.

You will also be wise to consider the following active principles:

1. Start where you are and work outwards.

At the start of their missionary career, Jesus told his disciples, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This naturally meant they should start where they were... then go throughout the surrounding region, then to the next province, then finally, after gaining much more experience, to places far away.

Learn from this to begin where you are, explaining the gospel to the people near at hand, then cover the area around you, and then the next province. Gain experience at each stage, preparing you for the next stage, until you are ready to go into more remote and difficult places.

2. Look for a place of great need, or a place of great potential.

Don't go where everyone else is going. Identify a place where there is no one doing what you can do. Look for a town with no church, a church with no teaching, a tribe with no Christians, a people-group with no scriptures, a people with scriptures who cannot read, a nation which was closed to the gospel but is now open.

Watching the world news, you may see a region in crisis where families in difficulty will welcome your help. Contacting a mission society, you may hear about an urgent need or an essential task that you think you might be able to do.

Look for places where people may be *particularly responsive* or ready to respond, with an urgent desire for change – dissatisfied perhaps with traditional beliefs, suffering racial or political oppression, ambitious (desiring to better themselves through contact with the latest ideas and the wider world), curious to know about Christianity (having had no previous contact with Christians), or influenced by prophecies or dreams.

See if there are any uprooted populations (refugees, prisoners, immigrants, students). These may have more freedom from social and religious control, and may be seeking to improve their circumstances. They may be quite open to the gospel.

3. Consider what your health, your age and abilities equip you to do.

If you can't stand hot weather, don't aim for central Africa. If allergic to curry, don't go to India. If you dislike reading, don't plan to be a Bible translator. If shy and quiet, don't agree to lead a series of noisy youth camps. If you have weak knees, don't offer to trek through mountains in search of nomadic tribes.

And more positively... If you speak a language, look for a place where that language might be useful. If you sing and play an instrument – or if you have medical qualifications, or are good with children, or have an academic degree, or know about short-wave radio – look for a place where that skill would be of particular value.

The role of churches and mission societies

A home church

As we have seen, a person desiring to become a missionary should seek the approval of their home church. There are three good reasons for this:

1. The church will know the *character* of the person. They will have seen if he or she is a godly believer, faithful and persevering in service and therefore worthy of confidence as a missionary.
2. The church will know the *abilities* of the person. They have seen what spiritual gifts he or she has contributed to the life and outreach of the fellowship. They should be able to advise about where those abilities might be put to good use.
3. If the church has approved and sent the missionary, the church will be more *committed* to praying and supporting the person they have sent.

A mission society

With the encouragement of their church a person may contact a mission society and ask for advice about where to go and what to do. There are certain advantages in joining a mission society:

1. Its leaders may be able to offer *useful advice* in choosing your sphere of service. They have wide cross-cultural experience, which the leaders of your own fellowship may lack. They will be aware of needs and opportunities in many places and may therefore see more clearly where your abilities could be put to best use.

2. They may visit and *speak in many churches*, stimulating prayer for you and also financial support.

3. They may provide good friendship and *pastoral care* for you (and your children), and help you deal with missionary problems that your church will not understand.

But a mission society may also put pressure on you to leave your work in order to attend conferences or visit places or write reports or accept administrative duties. This can seriously distract you from language study and from the work of evangelism and discipling. These are issues you could discuss with them.

Hindrances to a missionary call

Some people called by God may find their desire frustrated. For example, a believer may wish to become a missionary but his church does not agree and refuses to offer any financial support. He contacts a missionary society but they will not accept him until he has a certain amount of money from his church.

In these circumstances he or she must pray and persevere in prayer. The Lord may lead him to continue serving faithfully in the outreach and ministry of the church – growing in knowledge and ability, sharing his missionary vision, and trusting that a number of friends (or the church itself) will in time be led to approve and support his missionary call.

Alternatively, he might decide to become a “tent-maker”, supporting himself with a secular job in a pioneer location, sharing his faith and teaching the scriptures there.

Some missionaries have simply gone out in faith, with no financial arrangements at all, trusting the Lord to provide in answer to prayer. Their needs may indeed be met in remarkable and unexpected ways. But sometimes a person like this has become a burden to other missionaries, who feel obliged to relieve his poverty. Paul was determined not to burden others, and we should have the same resolve (2 Thess 3:8; 2 Cor 11:9 etc.).

Missionary training

The best possible training was that received by Peter, John, Silas, Timothy and others in the New Testament who worked alongside an experienced missionary. Some churches, unfortunately, do not give good opportunities for their young people to learn through experience in this way. Some do not provide adequate knowledge of the Bible, nor apply it to the real problems of life in a variety of cultures. For this reason a course in a missionary training school, and a short-term mission with a well-organised society, may both be very helpful. Indeed there are areas of

knowledge and experience which most believers do not need but which are essential for a cross-cultural missionary.

As part of your preparation, you should learn what you can about the beliefs and customs of the people you intend to reach. Think how you might apply the gospel to their felt-needs. Then consider what additional preparation may be necessary for the place you are going to and the work you will be doing.

It is usually important to learn at least a little of the local language before arriving in the field, so you can immediately make friends and win respect.

Acquiring qualifications or skills in medicine or engineering may prove useful, and the ability to teach a foreign language may also open doors. Knowing how to repair a car or a generator, or how to grow vegetables in a tropical climate, may add greatly to your comfort, health and safety. And every missionary should acquire some understanding of First Aid, hygiene, a healthy diet, and basic medications.¹

Personal guidance in mission

Having decided where to go, how can we know what we should do? There are many people in need, many houses or villages to visit, many scriptures to translate or teach. How can we know which of these tasks to undertake?

If I am doing one thing, should I change to something else? If I am in one place, should I go to another place? What is the Lord wanting me to do today, or tomorrow, or the coming year?

At the outset there are two truths revealed in scripture which may greatly encourage us:

1. The Lord prepares the work for us: “so we may do the good things he has planned for us to do” (Eph 2:10).

2. The Lord prepares us for the work: “for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13).

This means there are specific tasks waiting for each of us – tasks which he has equipped us to undertake. But how can we know for certain what they are?

This is not a matter for hasty decisions affecting your life and the life of many others. When Paul was leaving Ephesus they begged him to stay, but he replied, “I will return to you if God wills” (Acts 18:21). Planning a trip to Corinth, he told them, “I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills” (1 Cor 4:19).

¹ On many aspects of preparing for mission, see Lois K Fuller: *The Work of a Missionary*.

A missionary must learn to “discern what is the will of God” (Rom 12:2). There are at least five ways to do this:

- Search the scriptures so you may know his concerns and priorities
- Seek advice from believers with practical experience
- Acquire all the practical information you can
- See how the Lord arranges circumstances
- Respond continuously to the witness of his Spirit in your heart and mind.

These five principles of guidance for missionaries are taught in the New Testament. Look up these references for your encouragement:

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| 1. Search the scriptures | Ja 1:22-25 |
| 2. Consult other believers | Prov 11:14 |
| 3. Obtain useful information | Acts 10:29; 8:34; Phil 1:9-10 |
| 4. Observe providence | Acts 14:27; 1 Cor 16:8-9 |
| 5. Respond to his Spirit | Lk 4:1; Acts 8:39; 11:12 |

In the New Testament we see missionaries guided in each of these five ways:

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|---------------|--|
| Acts 5:28-29 | 1. by the biblical principle of obedience |
| Acts 8:4-5 | 4. by providential circumstances |
| Acts 9:23-30 | 3. by useful information and 2. advice from other believers |
| Acts 13:1-3 | 2. by consulting the believers and 5. the witness of the Spirit |
| Acts 13:46-47 | 1. by the written word of God |
| Acts 15:6-25 | by all five |
| Acts 16:6-10 | 5. by the witness of the Spirit and 4. providential circumstances |
| Acts 16:13-14 | 3. by useful information (discovering a place for prayer) |
| 2 Cor 2:12-13 | 5. by spiritual concern (the witness of the Spirit with his spirit) |
| Gal 2:1-10 | 4. by a providential revelation and 2. by consulting other believers |

Seeking guidance in this way may take time, but it is time well spent, enabling you to be “filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col 1:9). You will know that you are doing the work he has prepared for you to do.

Missionary Motivation

There are several possible reasons why believers will get involved in mission (as missionaries or as supporters of mission).

Their great desire may be...

- **to glorify God.** As servants of God, our desire is for all the world to know his glory and enjoy fellowship with him (Phil 2:10-11).
- **to obey Christ.** As disciples of Jesus, we want to please him by obeying his Great Commission (John 14:15).
- **to rescue the perishing.** As sinners saved by grace, we want to help others escape eternal condemnation and gain eternal life (Matt 7:13; Jn 3:16).
- **to hasten the coming of Christ.** Longing for the return of Christ, we desire to hasten that day by testifying to every tribe and tongue (Matt 24:14; 2 Pet 3:11-12).
- **to love my neighbour as myself.** Concerned for the needs of others, we want to ease suffering of every kind and share our many blessings (Mark 12:31; Matt 14:14).

Mixed motives

Some people may want to become missionaries for wrong reasons. It could be a desire for adventure or admiration or status in the church, or perhaps a hope of financial support, or zeal to promote a particular church denomination or doctrine against another. In some cases missionary service may seem like a way to atone for a past sin or to become a better Christian. It may be an attempt to escape from a bad situation at home or in church.

When someone has false motives, the Lord does not bless their work. They usually get frustrated and give up. It is essential to be right with the Lord and with other people. If we are not, we cannot expect him to help or provide for us.

In Philippians 1:15-26 we see various motives for mission. Some people may have bad motives, such as envy and rivalry (v.15), or selfish ambition (v.17). But most, like Paul himself, are inspired by good intentions (v.15) – by love (v.16), to exalt Christ (v.20), and for the progress and joy of others in the faith (v.25).

Only a missionary who walks with God will be blessed by God. But sometimes a person who becomes a missionary for a wrong reason, later discovers a right reason and *becomes an excellent missionary*.

Pioneering Strategies

A missionary arriving in a place for the first time will want to have positive friendly contact with the local people. So before you get there, consider how to reply when they ask you who you are and why you have come. Make some initial decisions about what you are wanting to offer. It may be a gospel message or a holistic project, or both. Or you may need to learn more about their circumstances before deciding on a choice of strategy.

In places that are “open” to the gospel

Where there is freedom for the gospel, positive proclamation may be very fruitful. We might try:

1. Mass evangelism

Methods include open-air presentations, door-to-door visiting, literature distribution and special meetings. The “New Life for All” campaign in Nigeria, for example, offered a very visible and exciting programme to the whole population. Throwing out a wide net they expected to catch all sorts of people. Then the process of follow-up, pastoral care and teaching would deal personally with each individual, introducing them to a good evangelical church in their area for their spiritual progress and growth.

2. Personal work:

In your home country among immigrants. Every city in the world attracts people from other places. In a city there are usually areas of housing with many immigrants. You may be able to go door-to-door in these neighbourhoods or put up a gospel stall in the market.

Some immigrants may have come from places where fellowships of believers are persecuted or do not exist. For example, there are Fulanis in Lagos (Nigeria), Yemenis in Bangalore (India), Somalis in Lusaka (Zambia). They are learning the local language and adapting to the local culture. This gives us opportunities to meet them and offer the gospel to them.

Be aware that immigrants may have faced tragic circumstances and can be suspicious of anyone trying to help them. On the other hand, some may be very pleased to accept your friendship and support, responding quickly to the gospel when it comes to them with love.

In a foreign country. It is essential to be flexible and open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as you move into a new culture. It is also important to

avoid causing unnecessary offence. Show respect for senior people. Ask permission if appropriate. Be sensitive to their cultural expectations.

In some places we can work openly as Christian missionaries. In other places we must be more discreet in order to avoid the possibility of public disorder, angry complaints or official expulsion. As a servant of Christ, you will be sensitive and patient, understanding how to help in the best possible way.

Find some means to win the interest and attention of the people. As the method you use will vary from place to place, consider what strategy is most appropriate for your particular context:

- A headman may ask you to set up a clinic or school, and you are happy to do this.
- You may show a gospel film in a public place, which awakens such interest that the people ask you to start a church.
- You may take a job as an English teacher and arrange a lunchtime Bible club for your students.
- You may have a market stall where you play CDs of scripture, spiritual songs or gospel messages, and talk with people who show interest.
- You may visit poor homes, taking food or medical help to the most needy.

If you go to a foreign country you may find that, even there, *immigrants* are more responsive than the indigenous people. So, for example, in London there are immigrant workers from Bulgaria and Hungary accepting Christ through the witness of black African churches.

In places that are “closed” to the gospel

In many places Christian missionaries are not welcome, and much careful thought must be given to our strategy. Here are some possibilities to consider:

1. Start a development project.

It could be a medical clinic, or an agricultural or engineering project, or a special initiative such as the distribution of reading glasses. This may enable you to be accepted in the local community and to share your faith discreetly.

2. Start a school.

In addition to reading, writing, general knowledge (and Bible stories if possible), an elementary school may teach many aspects of *good behaviour*. Parents and officials will usually be very happy about this. So we tell the children, “Respect your parents and your teachers. Don’t smoke, drink, lie,

covet, steal, fight etc.” Eventually a child may say, “I can’t do all those good things. It’s too hard.” This is your opportunity to explain how Jesus came to give him or her a new heart and take all the bad things away. Lead that child to faith in the Saviour.

3. Find a person of peace.

Going to a new place, pray for the Lord to lead you to someone who will welcome you and become your friend. (If you are a man, look for a man of course, and if you are a woman look for a woman.) Your friend will then explain to the other local people what you are doing, and perhaps become your first convert. Look especially for someone who is:

- **a person of peace**, that is one who is pleased to accept you. Jesus told his disciples, “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him” (Lk 10:5-6).
- **a bilingual person**, who speaks your language and can interpret for you.
- **a respected person**, who has the confidence of his community. He may be a chief or an official or the head of a respected family. He should not be very young or very poor or a marginal person in any way.
- **a believer**, if there are any, or at least a nominal Christian, who will support what you say.

If you can find a person with all (or most) of these qualities, *commit yourself* to him or her before you start sharing your faith widely. Jesus said, “Whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart” (Matt 10:11).

Bear in mind that, as your person of peace helps you, he will expect *you* to help him. To be accepted over a period of time, you must usually offer something in return – medical care, English lessons, financial backing, trade contacts etc. – so be ready for this.

Make friends with his family and friends. Win the respect and confidence of the wider community. Discern what problems and anxieties each of them may have and try to help in practical ways. In addition to building relationships, this will enable you to learn the language well. Take opportunities to talk about yourself; tell them what you believe and why it is important to you. Start to teach your friend (and his family and friends) about Christ. Think carefully how the gospel can relieve their worries and ease their situation.

4. Find suitable times and places for bold outreach.

In any nation there may be places where the central authorities keep a close watch and suppress gospel outreach, and other parts where more relaxed local authorities are in charge. There may be desert and mountain

areas where little authority is exercised at all, and so long as you keep on good terms with the inhabitants there, you can share your faith quite openly and safely.

Almost anywhere, if you move quickly, you may be able to explain the gospel in public places, give out tracts and CDs, and move on before authorities or fanatics catch up with you. Leaving your phone number, email or other means of communication will then enable people who are interested to make contact with you. You might repeat the visit every month or two.

First impressions

When you first arrive as a missionary among unreached people, they will immediately form an opinion about you. First impressions cut deep and are not easily changed, so you must try to win their respect as quickly as possible. To them you are...

- **a foreigner**. For this reason you may be despised, or you may be respected, but you will always be different from them.
- **a guest**. They may expect to give to you, or to receive from you, or probably both. They may be both hospitable and demanding. Secretly, among themselves, they may be suspicious about your motives.
- **a person who may cause problems**. For this reason be careful to avoid any initial disagreements and bad feeling.
- **a person who may solve problems**. Start by solving whatever simple problems you can.

If you have *not* said anything about your personal faith, they may expect you to be...

- **an immoral person** (a cowboy, gangster, hard drinker, adulterer, film star etc, as seen on television).

If you *have* spoken about your personal faith they will expect you to be...

- **an expert in religion**. If you are not an expert they will see no reason to respect your opinion. Bear in mind that traditional religious leaders are usually practitioners, not teachers. They provide spells, charms, sacraments etc. For this reason people will expect you to *do something religious* for them, not just to tell them about things that happened long ago. You might offer to pray for them or their home and family, or teach them a song, or give them a Bible verse as a promise from God.

Stages in pioneer mission

Before you go to an unreached people-group you will want to learn all you can about them. Look for articles or books about that group or similar groups. Talk with people who have experience of them.

Then, if appropriate, look for immigrants who have come from that area. Make friends with them and start to learn a little of their language. After a while, tell them you would like to visit their homeland. They may offer to go with you, or ask their friends and family to make you welcome.

When you settle among them, you may find there are five stages in pioneer outreach. As you learn the language, you will acquire the words you need to deal with each stage.

1. Preparation

- Start to live among the people.
- Make friends and win respect. Tell them about yourself and explain why you have come.
- Acquire the basic language and culture skills you need to survive.
- Prepare for your holistic ministry if you decide to have one.

2. Outreach

- Begin your holistic ministry if you intend to have one.
- Listen to what people are saying as you try to discern their personal felt-needs, their religious frustrations, and their natural affinities (truths already known to them which can lead them to faith in Christ).
- Pray for those who are ill, and give what medicines you can. This will show that you love them and want to help them. The Lord may quickly restore their health, with suitable treatment, in answer to prayer.
- Find a time and place when people will give you their focused attention. If they are not listening, they will not hear or remember what you say. Learn how to gain the full attention of a person or a group by showing personal interest in them, by emphasizing the value of what you have discovered, and by preparing a few simple openings such as...
 - a short attractive spiritual song
 - a photograph of your family or a friend's family. Explain how those in the photo who have died will rise when Jesus comes, how the young are learning from him how to live a good life, the married are learning how to have a happy home etc...
 - a calendar with a gospel verse for each day. Read and discuss the verse for that day.
 - a prayer. Ask, "Would you be willing for me to pray and ask God's blessing on you and your family?" People often learn more of the gospel from our praying than our preaching.
 - a reading. Say, "Jesus Christ did many wonderful things. Would you like me to read to you about one day in his life?"

- Discover how to explain the gospel in such a way that they see it is good news for them in their own situation. Start by saying it is a wonderful thing. Offer it joyfully. Apply it to your own felt-needs and theirs.

- Look for illustrations and parables in local circumstances. Are there bridges that get washed away, or crops that demand water but yield no harvest? Is there a power-cut, a polluted well, an effective medicine, a narrow doorway, a poisonous snake, a safe place, a lock and key? Use these to illustrate some aspect of the gospel.

- Create a simple default gospel message appropriate to that culture (something like The Three Rs – ruin, redemption, regeneration, or the Four Spiritual Laws, or the Five Ages of the World – creation, fall, miraculous signs in one place, atonement, eternal salvation everywhere). Be ready to offer it at any moment. Take advantage of every opportunity.

- Translate some scriptures. Learn to preach the gospel from the Gospels using incidents from the life of Christ. Create some gospel songs that you can sing to adults or children.

- Print or record some additional gospel tools. Remember that printed tracts may be of special interest to people whose language is not normally written. MP3 players and audio CDs will attract people unfamiliar with recordings in their dialect.

3. Fellowship

- When you have a few interested people or definite converts, you will want to meet together... every day if possible.

- The best place to meet is usually the home of a local person, so they will understand that it is their meeting, not yours. If homes are too crowded, or have too many interruptions, or might endanger the family, it may be better to meet in a field or orchard or other sheltered place. Inviting them to your own house could be a possibility... but if you do, be aware that the meetings may stop if you are not there. To rent or build a room for meetings will be a more expensive option, but they may prefer it – let them do this if they want to arrange and pay for it.

- When you meet together, do as the early believers did in Acts 2:42 – study the apostles' teaching; discuss your circumstances and how the Lord is helping you (fellowship); share a simple meal remembering Jesus; and pray for one another. Teaching may be prepared in advance, or alternatively just read together from the New Testament and ask, "What do you think about verse 1?... verse 2? etc." An excellent discussion may follow, raising issues and questions of importance to those present.

- Decide how and when to baptise those who put their trust in Christ.

4. Leadership

- Encourage all the believers to take initiatives and develop their abilities. Notice those who understand the Bible well, who live a life of integrity and show a desire to help others. Help them to set an example and take a lead.

- Take some disciples with you when you go to proclaim the gospel or to teach elsewhere. Invite them to speak. You will see which of them are gifted as evangelists or teachers. Help them gain experience and confidence, and encourage them to serve the Lord in their own way when you are not there.

- The standard required for elders in 1 Timothy chapter 3 may not be attained immediately by new believers who have escaped with difficulty from a different religion and worldview. Don't worry if a person who is making good spiritual progress suffers a serious lapse. Help that brother or sister to repent, renew their commitment and continue their growth.

- Remember that Paul usually taught new converts every day for several months, then left them for a year or two, then returned to see how they were doing. By that time it was clear which of them had become respected as leaders, so he would willingly recognise the position they had earned.

5. Networking

- Take some disciples to visit believers for fellowship and prayer in other places. Encourage them also to make such visits on their own, so that a supportive network begins to grow across the region or the nation.

- The believers may suggest that their local leaders might meet together in a central location once a year or even once a month. In this way the leaders will gain wider experience and learn to love, support and encourage one another at a regional or national level.

Conflict Situations

In many places there are serious and sometimes violent tensions between racial or religious factions. This makes cross-cultural mission especially difficult, because conversion can seem like betrayal. In this situation, the first priority may simply be for peace. Once there is a measure of peace among *people* of different tribes and cultures, then we may be able to help them find peace with *God* through faith in Christ (1 Tim 2:1-7).¹

There are two levels at which we work for peace:

1. Multi-ethnic secular associations.

The aim is to create a publicly recognised body encouraging multi-ethnic co-operation for the benefit of all.

A committee may be appointed with representatives from all factions. These individuals will have a strong desire to promote friendly and respectful collaboration. Together they will initiate projects for clean water, health care, roads, law and order etc. This will involve as many people of goodwill as possible, whatever their race or religious beliefs may be. It will gradually build relationships of trust that are clearly productive and beneficial for everyone.

2. Multi-ethnic believers' fellowships.

These are usually much less advertised and more discreet, because conversion to Christianity may arouse public anger and resentment.

In fact a multi-ethnic Christian fellowship provides a wonderful example for the nation, welcoming people of many races. It may also be involved in holistic caring ministries that win widespread respect and admiration. Its members, and especially its recognised leaders, must be genuinely born again followers of Christ. Its emphasis on gospel culture unites its members, enabling strong multi-ethnic relationships to develop.

Culture Shock

People commonly experience culture shock when they enter a culture which is unfamiliar and uncomfortable. It may be in a foreign country, or among people of a different race and language, or even a different social community in your own nation.

The experience of culture shock

What is culture shock like? What are its symptoms? To start with you may have feelings of anxiety, confusion, uncertainty, disorientation and stress. You feel tired and tend to become irritable and bad-tempered. You may joke about the silly things people do or fail to do.

Then you start to grumble and complain about the climate or other physical conditions. You do not like the place you are in. The local inhabitants may seem dirty or unpleasant. You become excessively worried about the danger of contaminated water or food, road traffic, diseases, insects, snakes, terrorists etc. You want to stay indoors.

The most difficult things are often environmental rather than social or religious – the heat, mosquitoes, unfamiliar food, diarrhoea, the living conditions, lack of water or electricity etc. Yet these physical things are part of entering a new culture and contribute to the experience of culture shock.

You think nostalgically of the old days, and imagine that your previous culture was wonderful. You are desperate to talk with people who will

¹ See Pastor Ephraim Kadala, *Turn the Other Cheek* (ACTS, Bukuru, Nigeria, 2009).

understand you. You may become obsessed with the idea of returning home.

An opportunity to grow.

If you deal well with culture shock, you will come through it a wiser and more balanced person. You will learn to think more clearly and to evaluate cultures more effectively (including your own culture). Eventually you will find that you can help other people adapt as you have done.

Most people go through a series of stages when settling into a new culture. This process may take a few weeks for some people, or several years for others. If you give up and quickly withdraw from the culture, you may only experience one or two of the early stages.

1. Excitement

To experience new people, places, and opportunities can be an exciting adventure. That is why so many people want foreign holidays. There are lots of new observations and discoveries – exotic food, clothes, music, wildlife, historic buildings, amazing scenery etc. The weather may be more pleasant, the sea may be warmer and the pace of life more agreeable. In hotels and tourist bazaars the local people may speak your language, and they are polite, helpful and respectful to foreigners. You are happy to accept and experience everything. It is all new, wonderful and romantic. This we may call the honeymoon period.

2. Assessment

You are not a tourist, however, and you will have to find a permanent place to live and start the work you have come to do. Before long you begin to have a problem with housing – you can't find a clean house in a quiet neighbourhood. You may have difficulty with shopping – you can't find essential items in the shops. There may be power cuts and water cuts. The climate begins to feel too hot or too cold. You become aware of dangerous diseases and unpleasant animals – insects, rats, snakes, uncontrolled dogs.

Most people do not speak your language. They may be too friendly or too reserved. Some do not seem to like foreigners; a boy may shout something at you that sounds rude. Certain people in the streets have habits that you find annoying or disgusting. You begin to worry about public hygiene and traffic safety.

Then you have a few unpleasant surprises. You meet your new work colleagues and do not immediately like all of them. You are not sure they all want you to be here. If you have children, there may be issues to face concerning their education and their need for friends their own age. You think about learning the local language but it seems quite difficult. You

begin to miss your friends and family. You long for familiar food and leisure opportunities.

The pace of life begins to feel too fast or too slow. It seems very quiet or very noisy. There are too many people around you, or not enough people. Many do not share your deeply held beliefs and values. They do not affirm what you say, and some may disagree with you quite forcefully. You wish to be polite but have difficulty knowing what is appropriate and what is not. Sometimes you think you have caused offence; sometimes you feel humiliated.

You begin to feel oppressed by the situation. You are miserable and tense, irritated with the people and the place you are in, and guilty about feeling so irritable. Mood swings are caused by minor issues. You start mocking or criticising, or both. Small annoyances or dangers get out of proportion. You want to stay in your house and avoid everything and everyone. Eventually you may become aggressive or cynical and start to make bad decisions and spoil relationships. You become obsessed with the possibility of being robbed or cheated, and start to accuse people unjustly.

It has all gone sour. The excitement of a new mission has turned to disappointment. With a sense of failure you may fall into depression. There may be a serious breach in relationships. You want to give up and go home.

This should all contribute to a process of assessment. You are learning the realities of life in a different culture. You are also learning about your own human weakness and your need for the grace of God to give wisdom, compassion, patience and self-control.

3. Adjustment

The first step to adjustment may be to take a short holiday somewhere away from the immediate stresses of daily life. Here you will seek the Lord for your spiritual renewal and assess your situation.

With a fresh perspective on the recent past, you may feel you should apologize to some people you have offended. If they themselves have any experience of culture shock, they will be sympathetic and quick to renew the relationship. They may be able to offer excellent advice for your specific situation.

With time to think, you will start to develop problem-solving skills, learning to do the best you can with what you've got. Discover how to utilize whatever transport is available. Get more information about useful shops, about places for relaxation such as parks and gardens or hotel swimming pools, and about qualified doctors or clinics for use in an emergency.

Begin to establish routines at work and in the community. Accept that the people around you were here before you. Adapt yourself to them and find

ways to be comfortable and useful among them. Re-establish your own personal beliefs and values. Regain your self-respect. Meet with other believers, if possible, to pray and encourage one another. Once you are feeling more relaxed and positive, you will begin to make better progress with the language.

By this point you are adjusting reasonably well to the culture. You already know what to expect in most situations and have developed some good survival strategies. Many things are becoming “normal”. You have regained a sense of humour that allows you to laugh at yourself rather than others.

You may now find there are new people who have just arrived and know less than you do. As you help them adapt to the culture, you realise you have come a long way. You may even feel that you are becoming an expert.

4. Attainment

After some weeks or months, you will probably feel at home in your new culture, and confident in most situations. You have made progress with the language and understand what is happening most of the time. You know how and where to get what you need. You can usually cope quite well with circumstances, even with the unexpected. You have learned how to maintain good relationships and get on well with almost everyone.

By now you probably appreciate and enjoy some aspects of your new culture better than the culture of your homeland. This does not mean you have completely adopted the ways of the people around you. There are some things which you cannot accept as a Christian, and certain forms of behaviour that are incompatible with your principles. But you have learned to respect the culture and enjoy it. You can work within it to accomplish what you want to do.

You may start to think of life as a game which you play with the people around you. Most of the time it is fun. Now that you know the rules and strategies, you can usually win when you need to. In fact you have adapted so well that you find life in your new environment far more interesting than in your homeland.

A Biblical approach to culture shock

Some Bible characters who faced culture shock:

Abraham left the city of Ur for a nomadic life in a foreign land. For his own safety or advantage he deceived his host in Egypt and was told to leave (Gen 12:10-20).

Lot chose to live in Sodom and was “greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked” (2 Pet 2:7). He barely escaped with his life.

Joseph became a slave in a foreign country. Adopting Egyptian culture, he kept his faith and rose to power. He said, “God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction” (Gen 41:52).

Moses fled from civilised Egypt to the wilds of Midian and married a Midianite (a descendant of Abraham). He benefited from the advice of her father and brother (Jethro and Hobab).

Samson embraced and then rejected Philistine culture.

Ruth left her homeland of Moab and went to live in Israel. She said, “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16).

Daniel in Babylon refused to compromise with the local culture on issues of food and religion. He influenced the religious policy of King Darius.

Esther was taken from her Jewish home to become a Persian queen.

Peter, when instructed to eat Gentile food, replied, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean” (Acts 10:14). But then he was the first to proclaim the gospel in a Gentile home.

Paul was upset by idolatry in Athens and by misunderstanding in Lystra. He was accused of advocating customs that were not lawful for Romans (Acts 16:21).

Conclusion: Many Bible characters faced culture shock. Later generations dealt with it well. We can learn a lot from them and be encouraged.

Survival strategies for culture shock

1. Maintain a measure of personal normality. In your own room surround yourself with familiar things – your favourite books, decorations, photos, music etc. Have a safe place – a comfortable corner. Eat a balanced diet and take daily exercise.

2. Don’t invest major energy in minor problems. Some difficulties are unavoidable, but don’t make them worse than they need to be. In cross-cultural situations we too easily “make mountains out of molehills”. Only a small number of things matter very much; most do not matter at all.

3. Change what can be changed. Don’t suffer unnecessarily. If you can improve your situation, do so. Find out how to be more comfortable. Buy some earplugs or air-freshener. Put some disinfectant down the drains. If there is a loud wedding party, go to visit another part of town. If there is a serious water cut, visit a friend or check into a hotel. If children are troublesome, have a polite word with their parents. If you have a problem with a colleague at work, ask that person to help or advise you, or ask someone else to mediate.

4. Accept the things you cannot change. If circumstances are not perfect, relax and get on with life anyway. There is always something to be thankful for. Learn the secret of rejoicing always and being content in all circumstances (Phil 4:11-13).

One thing you cannot change is the past. Draw a line under it and move on. Put right what you can, and leave the rest with the Lord. If regrets and resentments continue to trouble your mind, keep it busy with other things – things that are pure and good (Phil 4:8).

Some problems that may seem permanent, with no solution in sight, can suddenly disappear. The situation changes overnight. Learn to pray and see what God will do (Phil 4:6-7).

5. Build some local friendships. Most people will respond positively to a gesture of friendship. Develop good relationships with neighbours and colleagues. Ask them to come for a simple meal, or make them some cookies or cakes. Look for things you have in common and talk about those things. Tell them what you are enjoying about their country. If appropriate, ask their advice. You will begin to feel at home in a place once you have some friends there.

6. Write it all down. Record your impressions and frustrations in a journal. This will provide a healthy outlet to express your feelings. It will also enable you to look back later and see what you have learned.

7. Pray. The Lord can change your circumstances, and he can also change you. He is able to give you wisdom to adapt, and patience to endure (Ja 3:13-18; 2 Cor 12:7-10). He can give you love for the unlovely (1 Cor 13:4-7).

Conclusion: Be prepared for culture shock. Learn something useful from every experience you have. But do not become obsessed with cultural issues. Your aim in life is not to become an expert in culture but an ambassador for Christ.

Pastoral Care for Missionaries

Personal problems in missionary life

There are certain problems that many missionaries face. Some of these issues may concern you personally. Or you may wish to help other people avoid or resolve them.

1. Some are inadequately supported.

Missionaries may not have enough money for food and rent. This can happen if their home church lacks love or respect for them or loses interest in their work. It may be their own fault if they have failed to send news of what they are doing. It may be the fault of the church leaders if they fail to read out the news in a main meeting. It may be a slackness in the church administration if the treasurer does not collect and send sufficient money.

Financial support may be low if their friends at home suffer circumstances of poverty. But it may also be low if their home church expects someone else to support them (a foreign society or another church), and so fails to accept responsibility for the missionaries they have sent. With thought and prayer, the church may find ways to raise more money for them.

Some missionaries may be advised or required by their society to visit a wealthy country in order to raise support, but this would take them away from their work. The amount they raise might not even cover the cost of their travel.

Inadequate support may lead some missionaries to seek paid employment or to supplement their income by growing vegetables or raising livestock among the people they are called to reach. This can be a blessing in disguise. It may help them to be known and respected in that community and elsewhere.

In time of need, many missionaries can testify that when people have let them down, the Lord has still provided for them – often in most unexpected ways (Matt 6:33; Phil 4:19).

2. Some have difficult living conditions.

Missionaries may suffer many aspects of culture shock. Their house might not be safe, healthy or comfortable. The people around them may be unfriendly or rude. Bad experiences may have undermined their confidence. Not understanding the language, they may misinterpret what is said and make serious mistakes. We have seen how to deal with these issues in the section above on Culture Shock.

3. Some have disagreements with other missionaries.

People who go to serve Christ in foreign countries are usually strong-minded and strong-willed. Tensions and conflicts can arise when dynamic people work together. Paul and Barnabas found they could not agree and so went in different directions (Acts 15:39).

Senior missionaries, having established a way of working that suits them, may not accept new ideas proposed by young people coming out to join them. This has caused many young missionaries to return home. It has

affected the health of older missionaries too. Pastoral care and wise advice may be needed in such circumstances so that everyone may be effective and happy in the work they are called to do.

4. Some are worried about their children.

If the missionaries' children are away at school, their parents may be worried that they are unhappy or homesick. The cost of keeping them at a boarding school may also be a concern.

If the children remain with their parents on the mission field, they may not settle at school in a foreign language and culture. There may be no other children of Christian families nearby who could be good friends for them. Childhood illnesses and accidents may be a continuous anxiety to parents.

5. Some may not know what to do each day.

Although some missionaries are very good at organising their personal activities and planning systematic outreach, others are less skilled at this.

Most will benefit from a daily or weekly schedule to be followed as closely as possible. At first there will be regular periods for language study. Particular times of day might be set aside for making friends and building relationships. Later there should be a consistent programme for active gospel outreach.

6. Some may suffer persecution.

This is an important subject which we will consider in the section below, Opposition and Persecution.

7. Some may get discouraged.

Many missionaries get discouraged. Even Paul was discouraged about the Galatians and the Corinthians, and about those in Asia who turned away from him, and those who abandoned him at his trial (Gal 3:1-6; 1 Cor 1:10-12; 2 Tim 1:15; 4:16).

Do not imagine that missionaries are so spiritual they never feel weakness or fear or anger. There may be times when they need to share personal problems and decisions with trusted friends. In circumstances of failure or disappointment, they will value the loving sympathy and prayer of the people at home (Phil 1:19).

It is important for us to pray for our missionaries but we should also listen to what they say, love them with steadfast love, help them in any way we can, and offer advice and counsel if appropriate. Take an interest in all their circumstances, and tell them how much you appreciate the work they are doing.

This subject will be discussed further in the section below, Dealing with Discouragement.

Stimulating church support

There are many ways to help a church become more involved in mission:

1. Look for opportunities to **teach the church** about the experience of mission in the New Testament, and especially from the book of Acts. Challenge young people to seek the Lord's will for their life and to consider cross-cultural outreach as a possibility.

2. Prepare interesting **news items for the main meetings** of the church, describing progress in mission around the world, and pray regularly for missionaries known to the fellowship.

3. Encourage the leaders to **re-assess the spiritual priorities** of the church. Is a building project really more important than supporting an evangelist to an unreached tribe? Could the church compound become a place where visitors from other countries receive help and find Christ?

4. See if you might **launch a gospel outreach** in your neighbourhood or further away. This would enable young believers to gain experience of evangelism and to develop their ability and vision. It could be an excellent preparation for mission in more difficult places.

5. If you have several people interested, **start a mission training course** preparing them for cross-cultural outreach. Provide some specific teaching like that offered in this Biblical Missiology course.

6. Invite and **encourage missionaries to visit your church**. Appreciate them and give them opportunities to speak about their work. Encourage your children to make friends with their children. Help the missionary family to feel loved so they know your church is their church too.

7. When missionaries return to their work, **send frequent messages** of encouragement with news from the fellowship. Assure them of your prayer. Consider what they might need and send it if possible. Remember, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together" (1 Cor 12:26).

Maintaining personal stability and growth

How can a pioneer missionary continue happy in the Lord when far from home?

Before arriving on the field, he or she should have learned how to walk with God, humbly, wisely and lovingly. Then as new challenges are faced and overcome, there will be further growth in spiritual character and personal faith.

On a practical level, live sensibly and intelligently. Learn how to be self-sufficient, and how to eat cheaply using whatever local vegetables and fruit

are available for a balanced diet. You may be able to grow certain vegetables or keep hens for eggs.

You will have a sense of achievement if you can repair your house, make your own clothes, mend your own shoes etc. Paint the walls, put up shelves if that is allowed by the landlord. The more you put your own mark on the place you live, the more you will feel at home there.

Take some good books, CDs and DVDs – for Bible teaching and for relaxation. Find out if a mobile phone contract or an internet connection would be possible, especially for use of Skype and email so you can communicate cheaply and easily.

Visit your home church every year or two if possible – not more often than this or you may never settle properly into the normal routines of life in the field.¹

Family life

Single or married?

Is it better for a missionary to be single, or married?

Paul has an opinion on this matter: “To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am” (1 Cor 7:8).

He has a reason for thinking this way. See 1 Cor 7:32-34.

A single person has certain advantages:

1. A single person is concerned simply to please the Lord and is always available to do his will and to help anyone in need. He or she can quickly change plans without needing to consult anyone.

2. A single person is free from concern for the needs of children, the preferences of a spouse, and the responsibility to provide for them.

3. A single person can occupy a smaller house and so pay less rent. He or she can eat and travel more cheaply, and be less of a burden when visiting other people.

But a single person may also experience particular difficulties:

1. We all have a natural desire for love and affection, and for someone to confide in – someone to pray with.

2. In time of illness or accident, a person on their own may be vulnerable.

3. There may be emotional or sexual frustrations: “It is better to marry than to burn [with passion]” (1 Cor 7:9).

¹ On many aspects of missionary life, see Lois K Fuller: *The Work of a Missionary*.

4. A single person may be less trusted than a married person. In many cultures an unmarried adult will seem odd and will be watched for signs of oddness. For this reason it may be harder for a single person to “avoid every appearance of evil” (1 Thess 5:22).

Marriage may largely resolve these issues, and in addition provide:

- a Christian home where a fellowship of believers can meet (1 Cor 16:19).

- a model of Christian marriage and child-raising that others may copy.

- a family of well-trained children who have learned to follow and serve Christ. They will be godly leaders and role-models for the next generation.

The missionary couple

People who are hearing the gospel for the first time will, of course, have no understanding of Christian marriage or family life. New converts will watch a missionary couple or family very carefully to see how they live. They will notice how the husband and wife speak and relate to each another, and how their children behave. Everything you say and do will be discussed behind your back. This is not a bad thing; it simply means that the new believers are learning from your example.

Many missionary couples will feel a tension between their responsibilities in mission and their responsibilities in marriage, and this may easily cause unhappiness. An evangelist, for example, may often be away from home and neglect his wife. A pastor may devote his time to the members of his church and forget about his own children. A missionary mother may be so involved with a school or clinic that she does not care properly for her family.

In some cases the opposite may happen. A missionary may be so busy looking after his wife, or improving his house, or schooling his children, that he has little time for gospel outreach or teaching new believers. If he thinks he is needed at home, he may not feel free to travel. In that case he should no longer consider himself a missionary but serve the Lord in some other way better suited to his circumstances.

Every missionary couple will need to discuss issues of this sort, gently and prayerfully, and so reach a willing agreement, accepting their responsibility for the work of the gospel and also for the well-being of the family. There are some biblical principles to bear in mind:

1. “Be **doers of the word**, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (Ja 1:22). Actions speak louder than words. If you have a happy family, people will desire to learn from you. If your home is tense and miserable, they will not respect you as a teacher or take much notice of what you say.

2. “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to **the interests of others**” (Phil 2:4). It is obviously sensible to make sure the people closest to you are content. A man with a happy wife will usually be a happy man. And a woman with a happy husband will be a happy woman.

3. “If anyone does not **provide for his relatives**, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim 5:8). Do not destroy your family for the sake of your ministry.

4. “If someone does not know how to **manage his own household**, how will he care for God’s church?” (1 Tim 3:5). A bad father or mother is unlikely to be a good missionary. What shall it profit anyone to gain the world for Christ and lose his own children?

5. “Let each of you **love his wife** as himself, and let the wife see that she **respects her husband**” (Eph 5:33). Almost every problem in marriage can be traced back to a lack of love in a husband or a lack of respect in a wife. Of course, the wife may have made herself unlovable, and the husband may be unworthy of respect. A moment of crisis may be an opportunity for both to make a fresh start. The husband will accept his duty to love, and the wife her duty to be lovable. The wife will recognise her duty to show respect, and the husband to be worthy of respect.

These principles, if followed, will save you much sorrow and bring much joy. They will enable your marriage to be a strong and stable force for good in your mission. See 1 Pet 3:1-9.

At the same time, of course, as a true disciple, I am called to deny myself and take up my cross daily, to love the Lord more than husband, wife or child, to be obedient above all to my Master’s call.

The missionary family

A husband and wife should talk and pray together about how to raise their children as young disciples of Jesus. Your desire is to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). Here are some suggestions:

1. Try to **make the way of Christ interesting** and exciting for your children – never boring or oppressive. Do not provoke them to resentment (Eph 6:4).

2. **Read a short passage every day** from a children’s Bible and pray with them – after the evening meal, for example, or at bedtime (2 Tim 3:15).

3. **Encourage each child to ask serious questions.** Show respect for each question, and always give an honest answer. If you do not know the answer, tell them it is a good question and that you will find the answer and tell them later.

4. **Ask visitors to share their testimony** briefly at mealtimes. Encourage them to explain why they put their trust in Jesus and what blessings have come through living with him as Saviour and Lord.

5. Remind your children that **Jesus teaches us how to have a happy home.** He taught us: “Love one another, just as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34). Remember these simple rules: “Be kind to one another” (Eph 4:32). “Give respect to one another” (Rom 12:10). “Let no bad words come out of your mouth” (Eph 4:29). “Think what others would like, not just what you would like” (1 Cor 10:24). If we live like this, our home will always be a place of happiness.

6. Agree as Mother and Father about **clear and consistent discipline.** For the benefit of everyone, make a few rules (not many). Explain the rules clearly, and insist that all the children keep them. If a rule is being broken, raise your voice slightly and count slowly and gently: “One... two... three.” This will give the child a chance to think and to change his or her mind. After “three”, then punishment will always follow, and the child knows it.

7. Establish **penalties that will bring regret** rather than resentment. If, for example, a rule is deliberately broken, you might say, “Go and sit in the corner until you are sorry!” Or, “There will be no television until you are sorry!” Enforce those penalties fairly, calmly and consistently. If this works well, you will never get to the point of losing your temper.

Note: Single people may find many opportunities to help raise children. A single lady may also have a church meeting in her home. So Paul writes, “Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house” (Col 4:15).

The missionary home

Visitors to any Christian home may enjoy a foretaste of paradise. They enter a place where everything is said and done with love. The transforming power of the gospel is seen more clearly here than anywhere else. It is shown in the way that mother, father and children relate to one another – cheerful, supportive, helpful and sympathetic. Into this happy place their guests are welcomed with warmth and affection.

Yet there can be particular tensions in a missionary family. At supper, for example, we may be speaking to our visitors in one language and our children in another. It is not easy to give focused attention to both. We and our children have our own culture, which may be quite different from that of our guests. The subjects of interest in one culture may be of no interest at all to the other.

Nor is it easy to keep a balance between our desire to be hospitable and our personal need for times of quiet, for rest or prayer or sleep or family activities, especially if people come at inconvenient times. An open door for friends, neighbours, strangers and travellers may enable such visitors to find faith, comfort and assurance in Christ, but can also lead to exhaustion for the missionary family. Often there are no easy answers. As the children grow, and visitors change, constant adjustment and readjustment may be necessary.

In a pioneer situation a missionary home may be the only safe place for believers to meet together. They might come for supper every evening and so begin to form a new family of faith. Some days the father or mother may not be free to sit with them for long. This is usually no problem, provided the believers know they are welcome anyway to enjoy fellowship there together. People understand that responsibilities may call us away from company for a while.

In practical terms it may help if you have two distinct rooms... an outer room close to the street door where everyone is welcome, and an inner room just for family use. In many cultures houses are normally divided in this way. It is then easy to move from one cultural environment to another within your own home when necessary.

It has been said that Christian homes were a key to the success of the early churches in the book of Acts.¹ If so, the missionary home could be a key to the success of gospel mission today. We should value the gift of hospitality and make full use of it.

Accountability

Accountability may be defined as “the obligation to inform someone else about our actions and decisions, and to justify what we have done”. Or more briefly, “the duty to inform and satisfy a superior”. There are two ways of looking at this:

1. As missionaries we will naturally want to thank our friends for their support and send them regular news. This is simply a matter of courtesy.

¹ See, for example, *Mission Strategies Then and Now*, chapter 4: The missionary experience of the apostles; and chapter 12: The ministry of women (pp.43-44, 139-140).

They will then be sure we have received what they sent and will know how to pray for us and our work. No one could possibly find fault with this.

2. In recent years there has been an increasing emphasis on missionary accountability. A missionary may be required to keep an exact record of the money he receives and spends, and even to show what he or she has done each hour of the day. This form of “accountability” raises more questions.

We need to see what the Bible says about it. In scripture we find that every Christian is accountable in three directions:

1. *Accountability to the Lord*

This is clearly stated: “Each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Rom 14:12). Paul said, “It is the Lord who judges me,” and when Christ comes he “will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God” (1 Cor 4:4-5; also 3:10-14).

Nothing we do in his name will go unnoticed: “For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do” (Heb 6:10). For this reason we labour, not as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ (Eph 6:6-8; also Col 3:23-24).

From the teaching of Jesus, we might even think that being accountable to God means hiding what we do from other people (Matt 6:4, 6).

2. *Accountability to your own conscience*

Paul said, “I always take pains to have a clear conscience” (Acts 24:16). Satisfying his conscience mattered more to Paul than satisfying the Jewish council (Acts 23:1). He would never be happy with himself if he knew he had done wrong: “For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity” (2 Cor 1:12).

The apostle was careful to assess the quality of his own work, and advised every believer accordingly: “Let each one test his own work” (Gal 6:4). He also tested his own character: “I am not aware of anything against myself” (1 Cor 4:4). So he could affirm, “We are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honourably in all things” (Heb 13:18).

A person who knows they have been honest and true will not be too concerned if people misjudge them. John said, “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God” (1 Jn 3:21). Paul said, “With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court” (1 Cor 4:3).

3. Accountability to other believers

As a gospel missionary Paul considered himself a servant to every believer and group of believers throughout the world – labouring “for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a servant according to the stewardship from God that was given to me” (Col 1:24-25). For this reason he was determined that no one anywhere should ever find a genuine fault in him. “We take this course so that no one should blame us” (2 Cor 8:20). “We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry” (2 Cor 6:3).

The apostle took care to send greetings and news to those who supported and prayed for him. After his first mission he reported back to the Antioch fellowship which had sent him out (Acts 14:27). He wrote letters to churches far away so they would know how his ministry was progressing (1 Cor 16:9). He sometimes sent a friend to tell them how he was and to encourage them (Eph 6:21-22). His letters are full of news, advice, exhortation and teaching (see Phil 1 for example), and he was especially quick to thank those who sent a gift (Phil 4:14-18).

But Paul never put himself under the control of a sending church or a mission society that would compel him to follow a system of accountability. He insisted, “If I were still trying to please human beings, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10).

Issues of accountability

Sending news

In our own day many missionaries are required to write regularly to their mission agency or home church, giving news of their work. Why is this so strongly emphasized?

1. We need people to pray for us (Rom 15:30-31; Eph 6:19-20).
2. We need people to support us financially (so the work we are doing may continue).
3. We need to show we are working hard and are therefore worthy of their trust.
4. We have opportunity to encourage and inspire our churches, and to set an example that others may follow.

Establishing confidence

But the question of accountability can sometimes become a serious problem. We may have too much accountability, or too little. It is hard to keep the balance.

Some agencies require financial accounts every month and detailed reports on the use of time. This can become a great burden. The missionary

who wants to go out and preach the gospel is forced to spend hours at a computer typing reports. He or she wonders why it is considered necessary, and may begin to question, “Does it mean they don’t trust me?”

It is usually not a question of trust but a desire to awaken more missionary interest in the church and indeed to raise more support for you. When people see that you are using their money well, they will be happy to provide for you. Receiving regular news, they will be able to pray more intelligently for you. What you write will be a blessing to them if you are prayerfully led by the Spirit of the Lord in what you write.

It is also possible, however, that they do not trust you. They may have had bad experience of missionaries who were not faithful. This does not mean that they suspect you personally of being unfaithful. But if they have been hurt and disappointed by others, you may need to win their confidence by showing you are absolutely worthy of their trust.

Writing reports

Writing a report can be difficult. It may sometimes happen that a missionary is discouraged and has little to say. Another time, there may be so much happening that the report becomes far too long.

A report should always be honest and balanced, with room for both good news and bad news. In reality it is often the bad news that moves the missionary’s supporters to pray. Then, through their prayers, you may see a major breakthrough, which will be a great encouragement to everyone.

In our reports we may be tempted to exaggerate personal success so that people will think well of us. We may also exaggerate personal needs so that people will feel obliged to help us. Your conscience will guide you to be as truthful as possible. Remember that Paul was more concerned to encourage his readers with the faithfulness of the Lord than to exalt his own reputation or to imply that he needed money (Phil 4:10-14).

Whatever we write as missionaries, it is important to respect the privacy of the local people we are with, especially those who are not yet believers. This is a matter of simple courtesy and respect. Do not pass on personal details which were shared with you in confidence. That would be offensive in most cultures, and if the local people become aware of it you could be accused of gossiping behind their back. If their photos are published in a magazine, they may think you are taking advantage of them to raise money for yourself. This may be quite unjust, but be aware of the danger and avoid it if possible.

It is safer to share news of well-established believers, requesting prayer with their willing consent. They will often be happy to encourage your friends and supporters and to have their photo in a magazine.

Maintaining relationships

Proclaiming the gospel and writing reports are two entirely different skills. Those who write the best reports may not be the best missionaries. Some excellent missionaries have been so poor at writing reports that their home church stopped supporting them and they had to leave the field. This is very sad and can easily be avoided. Learn how to write better or else communicate by phone.

Having sent out a missionary to a particular place, the home church will naturally be interested in that place. They might ask for news from other missionaries or believers in the same area – especially if their own missionary does not send much news.

A church may also send someone to visit their missionary in the field. This should encourage the missionary and also enable the church to know more about the circumstances they are in. A wise and experienced visitor will gain a good idea of what is really happening by seeing their missionary at work, and so discern how best to help and support him or her.

Opposition and Persecution

We know that the gospel will sometimes cause offence. Jesus and his apostles did not go looking for trouble but sometimes found themselves in trouble anyway. We should avoid trouble as far as possible... but also know how to deal with it when it comes. Here are some basic principles to bear in mind.

1. Don't cause unnecessary offence.

Our task is not to criticise other religions or beliefs. Paul, for example, did not tell anyone to burn their books of magic. In Acts 19 the converts themselves decided to do this. In fact for two years Paul had preached the gospel in Ephesus without saying anything offensive about the goddess Diana. The town clerk testified that Paul and his friends were “neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess” (Acts 19:37).

The behaviour and speech of an evangelist or missionary should never be offensive. The only offence to be found in us should be our declaration that Jesus died a shameful death for our sake. That is “the offence of the cross” (Gal 5:11).

2. Preach a positive message.

Our task is not to tell people they are bad, nor to persuade them they are sinners. It is the Holy Spirit's work to convict of sin; it is our task to *proclaim* Christ. We must make known what he has said and done and will

do when he returns. We teach what he taught about the love of the Father, the Kingdom of Heaven and the age that is yet to come.

In addition to this, we should *testify* about our experience of salvation. We can describe how he has taken away our sins, changed our life for the better and given us assurance for eternity.

When people hear these wonderful things they may respond like Peter confessing, “I am a sinful man O Lord.” They may ask, like the Philippian jailer, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” It will be our privilege then to show them the way of salvation through personal faith in Christ.

3. Be glad for each person who comes to faith.

Proclaiming the gospel is hard work, bringing many discouragements. Learn to rejoice with the angels in heaven when a single soul finds safety (Lk 15:7). Don't focus on the difficulties or on those who refuse to accept your message. A small number *shall* enter by the narrow gate; a little flock *will* receive the kingdom. Only a few names were found in Sardis but they *were worthy* to walk in white (Matt 7:14; Lk 12:32; Rev 3:4).

A pioneer missionary among unreached people may often be lonely, weary, uncomfortable and in danger. An evangelist who welcomes strangers into his home may see his hospitality abused. A woman who helps a fallen sister may see her generosity exploited or misunderstood. A pastor who labours to support a weak believer may see his disciple turn against him. But there will be some who prove faithful and true – focus your thoughts on them (Phil 4:8).

4. Offer your suffering to Christ as a gift of love.

Our Saviour loves us so much that he gave his life for us! What can we offer in return, to show our love for him? Surely he needs nothing we can give. Yet in this world he needs someone to speak for him. He died in vain if no one hears that he died for them. He needs us to make it known. He has asked us to make it known even to the ends of the earth. This is not easy but it is something we can do for him.

If the gospel is to be heard in every tribe and tongue, many of us must endure hardship in the proclamation and some may die in the attempt. Paul said, “I am happy to suffer for your sake, because I am completing in my physical body what must still be added to the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body the church” (Col 1:24).

If you are not in trouble yourself, you may help others who are: “Recall the former days when... you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison” (Heb 10:32-34).

Do not worry if your possessions are taken away: “You joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one” (Heb 10:34).

Offer your tears, sweat and blood to the Lord as a gift of love, and be sure he will not forget. We have seen that “God is not unjust so as to overlook... the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints” (Heb 6:10).

Do not be surprised if you are accused unjustly or rejected. Jesus was the kindest and most compassionate of men, and they rejected him. “If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household” (Matt 10:25). To suffer in the same cause as Jesus, and for the same reason, is the greatest privilege a disciple can possibly have: “If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name” (1 Pet 4:16).

Finally, remember that nothing we suffer for Christ will ever be wasted or lost. “Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven” (Lk 6:23). In this world and the next there are friends who will love us more dearly on account of our sufferings for his sake (Mk 10:29-30).¹

5. Be assured that you are on the victory side.

Your disciples may turn back, your church fall apart, your health fail, your hopes vanish, but whether you feel it or not, you are still on the winning side. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31).

A day will come when “every knee shall bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10-11). Jesus has assured us, “I will build my church, and the powers of the underworld shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ or prevent the gospel reaching every tribe and tongue (Rom 8:31-39).

Dealing with Discouragement

At certain times a missionary may easily start to think: This is a terrible place; the language is too difficult; the people are not interested; the converts are very weak; nothing is happening.

The missionaries sent out by your church may not mention these thoughts in their newsletters, but if you ask them, some will tell you honestly about their discouragements. They may also tell you how they overcame the difficulties they faced, and persevered until there was great blessing in their work.

¹ See *Mission Strategies Then and Now*, chapter 14, Preparing for persecution (pp.169-174).

Unnecessary discouragement

Discouragement is often made worse by false and unrealistic expectations. Well-meaning people may exhort us to pray or fast, or fulfill other conditions, in order to start a revival or mass movement. Many missionaries have done everything they can to fulfill the conditions and still not seen anything significant happen. They feel disappointed.

The fact is that we cannot always start a revival or a mass-movement anywhere we wish simply by praying enough or fasting or exercising faith or preaching with power or producing signs and wonders or fulfilling other conditions. In the Biblical Missiology course we have looked carefully at the reasons why mass movements start in certain places at particular times. (See the document “Rapid Mass Movements”.)

We can also become discouraged when it seems that God is doing amazing miracles in other places but never where we are. Impartial investigation shows that many reports of signs and wonders are exaggerated or untrue. News is passed on and becomes more spectacular each time it is retold. This is intended to encourage but actually works to discourage. If we do not see such things happening where we are, we naturally feel there is something wrong with us. The effect on outsiders can also be devastating. When Christians make claims that are proved to be false, many people become disillusioned and even disgusted with Christianity. Our faith in Christ does not require us to believe everything but to believe what is true. It will lead us to think honestly and to state the truth clearly.

Overcoming discouragement

Let us look now at some common causes of discouragement and see how to deal with them. There are times when we may easily think...

1. This is a terrible place.

Many missionaries feel this at some stage. It is an aspect of culture shock which we have already considered.

2. The language is too difficult.

Every missionary has days of frustration with the language – learning it, speaking it, hearing it, reading and writing it, and sometimes misunderstanding it. We must pray for grace and also for common sense. Here are four essential principles to bear in mind:

- **Start young.** The best time to learn a new language – without any conscious effort – is in your infancy (aged 1-5). After that, a child or teenager can still usually pick up new languages quite well. But every year after the age of 20 or 25 it becomes more difficult. The ears, eyes and brain

are gradually becoming less sensitive to detail and less adaptable to new mental processes and disciplines.

Before applying to join a mission society many young people get married, and some even have children. The societies may then require all candidates to complete a year or more at Bible college, and after that to gain experience with a local church, before starting language study. The result is that many missionaries do not begin learning a foreign language until they are in their late 30s or 40s. This adds greatly to their difficulties.

Learning a foreign language for the first time is quite different from learning anything else. Biblical or theological studies may be undertaken at any stage of life, but languages should be learned while the body is still developing. New languages require new mental processes in specialised areas of the brain, connecting extremely subtle sounds and ideas. They also demand greatly increased sensitivity and precision in both hearing and speaking. We all have the potential to do this but by middle age most of us have lost it.

- **Start now.** Whatever your age, start learning the language as soon as you possibly can... before you travel anywhere, and before you have the added complications of a new place to live and a new work to undertake.

Learning the language will increase your love for the people who speak it and prepare you well for your mission. Arriving among them, you will be able to understand and communicate certain things immediately. This will be a great encouragement, enabling you to make friends quickly and to identify useful words and expressions as you hear them.

- **Learn the right language.** Experience shows that most missionaries are able to learn one foreign language well enough to communicate quite freely. But only a small number have the linguistic ability, personal discipline or time to be effective in two or more. It is important therefore to discern from the start which language will be the main language of your spiritual ministry.

Many mission societies require you to start by learning the national or regional language rather than a local language. They will point out several advantages. It means you can communicate with educated people over a wide area. And it may enable you to be literate – to read street signs, weights and prices in the shops, medical instructions, electricity bills etc.

But if you are not naturally gifted as a linguist, you may then find it very difficult to add a local language at a later date. If your intended spiritual ministry is in a local language, and you do not learn that language, you may find you have no ministry. You have learned the language you need for administration but not for explaining the gospel or teaching the Bible or

praying with people in need. If you are aiming for ministry in a local language, it is usually wise to start with that language.

- **Find the best method.** People learn languages in different ways according to their temperament and education. Some like to study on their own using books and recordings. Some like to have a language helper who will teach them words and sentences and talk naturally with them. Others prefer a classroom situation with organised lessons. Some simply go out among the people and listen, repeating what they hear. Look for the method, or combination of methods, that will work best for you. If you have difficulty with one method, try another.

3. The people are not interested.

It often happens that people show no interest in the gospel. This is quite normal. Jesus anticipated that many people would not have ears to hear (Mk 4:21-25). He expected some would not receive his disciples (Matt 10:14). He knew that much of the good seed would fall on the path, the rocky ground or the thorns, and yield nothing – but there will always be some that falls on good soil and bears a harvest (Matt 13:18-23). If people are unresponsive there are two things you can do:

- **Persevere.** In pioneer outreach it often takes a long time for a first convert to appear. William Carey was seven years in Bengal before baptising his first Indian believer.¹ Robert Morrison was seven years in China before seeing his first convert.² It also took seven years in the Godavari delta of India before any accepted Christ.³ In many other places it took far longer – twenty or thirty years or more. Knowing this, we should pray and preach more earnestly, and persevere until the first one comes in. After that, others may follow more easily. Do not give up too quickly.

- **Consider a change of method.** Ask yourself: Are we using a method unsuited to this culture? Are we offering a gospel which makes no sense to this people? Are we sufficiently sensitive to their felt-needs that we can see how Christ will meet those needs? Have we found a way to introduce the gospel so they will immediately see it is good news?

Then there may be some other things to change – the times and places where we offer the gospel, the specific people we offer it to, the use of media such as films, tracts and audio recordings, the ways we make initial contact – door-to-door visiting, advertisements, open-air meetings, medical

¹ Ruth Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* (Zondervan, 2004), p.126

² Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Penguin, 1964) p.281

³ E B Bromley, *They Were Men Sent From God* (Scripture Literature Press, Bangalore, 1937), pp.65-66

work etc. Our personal appearance or clothing or form of transport may even make a difference.

Then it is good to ask: What can we learn from the methods of Jesus and the apostles recorded in the New Testament? What can we learn from experienced missionaries in our own area or in other areas? Would it be an advantage to bring in a convert from elsewhere, a person of their own race and language, to work with us? A change of method can work wonders.

4. The converts are very weak.

You may spend weeks or months teaching, encouraging, praying with your disciples and then see them falling back into the ways of the world. Here again are two words of advice:

- **Bear with them patiently.** Despite our careful teaching and our best example, there will always be some who disappoint or fail us, or even betray us. Remember that among the twelve disciples of Jesus, one swore he did not know him and another became a traitor. In his darkest hour, all forsook him and fled. But these later came back and served him well.

Many of Paul's converts were far from perfect. Some were jealous, quarrelsome and divisive (1 Cor 1:10; 3:3). Others rejected the freedom of the gospel and insisted on rigid rules (Gal 3:3). Some said he was weak, and disputed his authority (2 Cor 10:10). Others started to blaspheme (1 Tim 1:20). Some began to teach error (2 Tim 2:17-18). Others were sexually immoral (1 Cor 5:1). Others were corrupted by a desire for money (1 Tim 6:10). Yet the Lord continued to use Paul in making disciples, and they continued to establish fellowships. Although some converts fell away and some groups did not survive (in Ephesus, for example), the movement that Paul started around the Mediterranean Sea has lived on, despite its failings, from that day to this.

Among our converts, it is hard to know which will continue well. Some with great potential may fall away and cause us grief, whilst others who seemed less gifted will persevere and bring us joy. That is our common experience in pioneer mission.

- **Appreciate the first three generations.** First-generation converts will surely be our greatest delight. It is wonderful to see these men and women coming out of darkness into light, escaping from generations of error and ignorance. But do not be surprised if they come with lingering traces of prejudice, bitterness, false beliefs and bad habits inherited from their ancestors. They may have suffered much and still bear painful scars. They may face continuing pressure from family and friends who give them no peace. If they become men and women of God, it will be a marvel of grace

and perseverance. If they can teach their children faithfully, they will have done well.

The *second* generation will watch all this and perhaps find fault, reproaching their parents for still following some of the old ways. Second generation believers, knowing the scriptures from childhood, can sometimes be quite critical and legalistic.

But the *third* generation, observing their parents and their grand-parents, will see the positive qualities in each. They will honour their *grandparents* for taking that first brave step of faith to follow Christ. They will value their *parents'* greater knowledge of the word of God and earnest desire to live by it. To this they will add their own measure of wisdom, compassion and love, built upon the firm foundation of two generations, yielding a spiritual maturity we may well admire.

In any new people-group the first three generations will each have a part to play in forming a new Christian community. Do not be discouraged if your first converts are weak. Your efforts and hopes are not fixed on them alone but on their children and grandchildren too. And be prepared for wonderful exceptions. There may be first and second generation Christians who become true men and women of God. There may be third-generation Christians who fall short. David Livingstone's only known convert, Sechele, was a disappointment to him and seemed to be a "back-slider". But some people now think that Sechele did more to spread the teaching of Jesus in southern Africa than Livingstone or any other European missionary at that time.¹

5. Nothing is really happening.

Those of us who have worked for many years in hard and unresponsive places may begin to wonder if anyone can ever come to faith or to maturity in Christ. We may be worn down by hopes repeatedly raised and disappointed. We must learn how to overcome our own discouragement and how to encourage others. Here are some things to remember:

- **Keep calm.** In hard and rugged places we walk with care and sometimes we stand still. We are building slowly and surely, running a long race, climbing a high mountain, tending an orchard through the seasons until the young trees are fully grown and ready to bear fruit for future generations.

- **Speak warmly of Christ.** This will encourage you. It is also the best way to draw others to Christ. In hard places, you will be happy to have one convert or two. If *they* will speak warmly of Christ to their friends and

¹ Stephen Tomkins, *David Livingstone: The Unexplored Story* (Lion, 2013)

family, they may win two more. The four could win eight, the eight sixteen, the sixteen thirty-two, and the thirty-two sixty-four. There can be exponential growth when every new believer speaks warmly of Christ. If you teach your disciples nothing else, teach them this.

- **Count your blessings.** In the desire for more progress we may easily forget the progress we have made. Count your blessings and list your achievements and give thanks for every one. You are now more experienced, more fluent and better equipped for mission than you were a year ago. You have sown many seeds and some may be sprouting unseen. Things can change very quickly with one visit, one conversation or one telephone call. The Lord will answer your prayers when the time is right. He may be answering them right now.

- **Widen your horizons.** At certain times you may need a break, a vacation, an opportunity to gain a fresh perspective. A visit to other places where people are more responsive may inspire you to take up your own work again with fresh hope and energy. You have seen what the gospel can do, and as you share your travel experiences (and photos) with the people you are trying to reach, this may awaken a desire in them for similar gospel blessings. Paul told the Jews about a response among the Gentiles, hoping they would become jealous and so begin to seek the Lord (Rom 11:13-14).

- **Encourage others.** Paul was an expert in the art of encouragement. How did he encourage? He reminded his friends of gospel truths and promises that do not change, saying “Encourage one another with these words” (1 Thess 4:18). He showed his warm appreciation for what they themselves were doing (Col 1:3-4; Philem 4-5 etc.). He assured them of his love and affection (Phil 4:1). He focused not on the discomforts of prison but on the progress of the gospel, knowing this would lift their spirits (Phil 1:12-14).

The ability to encourage is a gift from the Lord but we can either cultivate this gift or neglect it (Rom 12:8). As we are sensitive to the circumstances of the people we are with, and those who receive our letters, our speech will be gracious, “seasoned with salt,” so we know what to say to each one (Col 4:6). Then every word will be “good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Eph 4:29).

An encouraging person will never be short of friends, and will not for long be short of converts.

The Serampore agreement.¹

Written in 1805, this was a very early manual of practical advice for missionaries working in association with the Serampore fellowship launched by Carey, Marshman and Ward in north-eastern India. The agreement is summarized here and rephrased in modern English:

1. to set an infinite value upon immortal souls
2. to learn all we can about the snares and delusions in which these ignorant people are held
3. to avoid doing anything which might increase their prejudices against the gospel
4. to seek every opportunity for doing good
5. to make the great subject of our preaching Christ the Crucified, as Paul did
6. to ensure that Indians may have complete confidence in us and feel quite at home in our company
7. to build up and watch over the souls that may be gathered
8. to help our Indian brothers and sisters to become useful, encouraging every kind of ability, cherishing every gift and grace in them, advising them to choose their own church leaders from among their own countrymen
9. to labour with all our might in advancing translations of the sacred scriptures in the languages of India, and to establish free schools so the people may learn to read them
10. to be constant in prayer and the development of our own spiritual life, so we may be fitted for this labour which is extremely difficult and more important than words can say. Let us often think of that missionary (Brainerd) in the woods of America, pouring out his soul before God for the perishing heathen, as nothing could make him happy until they found salvation.

And finally, that we give ourselves completely to this glorious cause. Let us never think that our time, our gifts, our strength, our families, or even the clothes we wear, are our own. Let us devote them all to God and his cause.

If we are enabled to persevere, we may hope that multitudes of converted souls will have reason to bless God to all eternity for sending his gospel into this country.²

¹ Serampore: pronounced *Say-ram-poor*

² See “The Serampore Form of Agreement,” *Baptist Quarterly* 12.5 (January 1947): 125-138, <www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bq/12-05_125.pdf>.