

Never have there been so many incredible opportunities for missionary work worldwide, yet there are tens of thousands of vacancies waiting to be filled on the mission field today. The harvest has never been so large – and the workers are frustratingly few.

Finding suitable missionary volunteers has never been easy – nor is it likely to get any easier. Missionary service demands dedication, determination and discipline – and these qualities are basically rejected by the television generation.

Every mission leader I know has had to grapple with an almost crippling shortage of staff and a serious shortage of long term commitment. The increasing attrition rate of first term mission volunteers giving up is destabilising missionary endeavours worldwide.

Most church goers today are secular in their mindset and lifestyle. They have few convictions, more questions than answers. They are reluctant to make long-term commitments. Our society is existential (concerned primarily about my own personal experience, now!) This throw-away, disposable culture is short-sighted, cynical and short of faith and vision for the future. Our present generation has become selfish, sloppy, soft, spoiled and self-indulgent, unaccustomed to personal sacrifice, unwilling to endure hardship, and unlikely to exhibit loyalty to any mission, devotion to duty or courage in the face of danger.

Bill Bathman – a missionary who has devoted over 50 years to missions, mainly serving the persecuted churches in Eastern Europe – put it this way: *"It's not that Christians in the West aren't willing to suffer persecution for Christ - they just don't want to be inconvenienced!"*

In this computer age our technological advantages over previous generations of missionaries is astounding. Instead of weeks of travel by boat and months by ox-cart and on foot, today we can literally reach almost any location in the world within a few days by aircraft, trains and 4-wheel drive vehicles. The advent of radio, computers, desk-top publishing, photocopiers and fax machines have made communications, Bible translations and literature production incredibly accessible to all.

Also medical advances now mean that missionaries to West and Central Africa are not being

sent to almost certain death. Malaria once made Africa the missionaries' graveyard – whole families perished planting the Gospel in this continent. The average life expectancy of a missionary to Africa was 8 years and to West Africa 2 years. Some died within 3 months of arriving.

CMS Missionary to Uganda, Alexander Macay, expressed the singleminded determination common to 19th century volunteers:

"I want to remind the committee that within six months they will probably hear that one of us is dead. But . . . when that news comes, do not be cast down, but send someone else immediately to take the vacant place."

Within three months one was dead. Within a year two more had perished. Within two years Mackay was the only one of their missionaries left alive in Uganda. He actually survived 12 years.

Rowland Bingham, a missionary to Nigeria vowed:

"I will open Africa to the Gospel or die trying."

Yet such devotion to duty is extremely rare today. With all our technological advantages we still lag far behind the 19th century missionaries in terms of actual effectiveness. It's not that we lack the tools – but the tenacity. Inventions are a poor substitute for integrity, initiative and innovation. Computers cannot make up for a loss of character. We have lots of programmes, but it is persistence and perseverance which fulfil the Great Commission.

Listen to these voices from the past, from missionaries who backed up their words with their lives:

= Nate Saint, a missionary pilot who was killed by the Auca Indians to whom he was ministering

in Ecuador wrote:

*"The way I see it, we ought to be willing to die. In the military, we were taught that **to obtain our objectives we had to be willing to be expendable. Missionaries must face that same expendability.**"*

= C T Studd, the famous cricketer turned pioneer missionary to China, India and the Congo, declared:

"If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him."

= Another missionary put it this way:

"Our God bids us first build a cemetery before we build a church or dwelling house, showing us that the resurrection of Africa must be effected by our own destruction."

= Johan Krapf, missionary to East Africa, lost his wife and two children within months of arriving in Africa. He wrote:

"Though many missionaries may fall in the fight, yet the survivors will pass over the slain into the trenches and take this great African fortress for the Lord."

= Sadhu Sundar Singh, missionary to Tibet, declared:

"I must obey my Master and preach His Gospel, regardless of the threats or suffering."

= Henry Martyn, missionary to India and Persia, wrote:

"To all appearance the present year will be more perilous than any I have seen, but if I live to complete the Persian New Testament, my life after that will be of less importance."

= Elizabeth Freeman, missionary to India, declared:

"I hope you will be a missionary wherever your lot is cast . . . it makes but little difference after all where we spend these few fleeting years, if they are only spent for the glory of God. Be assured there is nothing else worth living for."

= Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf, the founder of the Moravian missionary movement, declared:

"I have one passion – it is He, it is He alone. The world is the field, and the field is the world and henceforth that country shall be my home where I can be most used in winning souls for Christ."

These are the inspiring words of Christians whom God used in wonderful ways. Their positive impact upon their world was incalculable. They literally affected the course of history. Not because of what they said, but because they put feet to their faith. As William Shakespeare said: *"action is eloquence."* Our actions are, in fact, the best interpreters of our thoughts and priorities.

Where can we find such Christian volunteers today? Or more to the point – **how can we produce such self-sacrificing disciples in our churches?**

If the church at the end of the Twentieth Century truly wants to obey the Great Commission, then we must produce tens of thousands of such disciples. To effectively evangelise the entire Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist populations in the final missionary frontier – the 10-40 window – we

will need an army of dedicated disciples. They will need to be like the missionary volunteers who made the 19th Century the greatest time of missionary advance and revival in history. And the prayer support base that sends them out will need to be just as dedicated.

What kind of disciples does the mission field demand?

An effective missionary needs to be a person who **diligently studies the Bible** to discover God's Will and who is **determined to obey it.**

Obedience is the best commentary on the Bible and as Martin Luther stated: "*I had rather obey than work miracles!*"

From this foundation of **prayerful study** of God's Word needs to develop true Christian character. This cannot be hastily done. Steadfast **Christian character**

Chris

is the product of years of prayer and Bible study and the cultivated habit of responding to God's Word in repentance, faith and obedience.

It involves a **teachable heart** and a **willingness to accept rebuke and discipline.** This is absolutely essential in missionary service because of the difficult tasks required, in the often harsh climates and inhospitable terrains, with the inevitable cross-cultural confusions and misunderstandings – mistakes and failures are inevitable. Resolving inter-personal disputes, overcoming obstacles and enduring criticisms are all part of our job description.

The measure of a person's real character is how he works when no-one is watching. Referring to temptation, C H Spurgeon advised: "*Learn to say: 'No' It will be of more use to you than to be able to read Latin*"

If you choose an act, you create a habit, if you create a habit, you shape a character. If you shape a character, You determine a destiny. As D L Moody said: "*If I take care of my character, my reputation will take care of itself.*"

And one of the marks of Christian character is integrity – the unshakeable commitment to be true to one's word. This is important because missions are built upon relationships of trust. We have a sacred trust to honour – with God, the churches and supporters who send us out and those to whom we are sent. There must never be any doubt that you as a Christian missionary will be true to your word, keep your promises and fulfill all your obligations.

Another vital aspect to be cultivated is one's attitude. Charles Swindoll has stated it most eloquently: "*Life is 10% what happens to us and 90% of how we respond to it . . . This may shock you, but I believe the single most significant decision I can make on a day -to-day basis is **my choice of attitude**. It is more important than my past, my education, my bankroll, my successes or failure, fame or pain, what other people think of me or say about me, my circumstances, or my position. Attitude is that 'single string' that keeps me going or cripples my progress. It alone fuels my fire or assaults my hope. When my attitudes are right, there's no barrier too high, no valley too deep, no dream too extreme, no challenge too great for me.*"

There is no doubt in my mind that a missionary volunteer's **attitude** is far more important than his **abilities** – or apparent lack of them. We all have preconceived notions of just what type of person will succeed in missions – yet time and again God surprises us and challenges us by using some of the most unlikely candidates in the most unexpected ways. The only common denominator is – **a willing volunteer with a positive attitude**

! I have seen many talented, gifted, promising people – with impressive resumes – fail and give up. And I know of many others – with far less apparent abilities – persevere and overcome disappointments, delays, discomfort, defeats and difficulties to succeed!

There is a major difference in people; the big difference is whether their attitude is positive or negative! As Leo Tolstoy wrote: "*We lost because we told ourselves we lost.*" Peter Daniels often challenges his audiences: "*If you think you can or you can't – you're right!*"

Pessimists will not make the most effective missionaries – certainly they wouldn't be very happy in the uncertain and difficult situations which so often prevail in the field. Pessimists have a problem for every solution. A pessimist is one who, when he has the choice of two evils, chooses both.

How we steadily and habitually think – that is what we tend to become. Negative people feel trapped by the past and helplessly look backwards at what might have been. Positive people feel inspired by the future and confidently look forward to what can be accomplished.

There are always many reasons why a certain task **cannot** be done. Those who succeed are those who are willing to learn, to work hard, to adapt, innovate and persevere to overcome all obstacles to complete their mission. This requires an inspiring vision of what God wants done and an optimistic attitude towards how God could use even me – in spite of myself – to accomplish His Will (2 Corinthians 3:5). The Bible reading Christian must eventually become an optimist: "I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength." Phil. 4:13

An essential aspect of a missionary's job description is a willingness to endure opposition and criticism. In fact, it would be very helpful if missionaries were sensitive enough to hear the still small voice of God's guidance whilst learning to adapt to foreign cultures, and thick-skinned enough to be unaffected by either flattery or unjustified criticism (the latter is far more common)!

A willingness to submit to authority and an openness to receive rebuke and criticism is essential. However, one also needs to discern between constructive and destructive criticism. As C.T. Studd said: "Had I cared for the comments of people, I should never have been a missionary." Of his time in China, Studd wrote: "For five years we never went outside our doors without a volley of curses from our neighbours." To cope with such hostility, a sense of humour is essential - as is seen in these examples.

John Paton, missionary to New Hebrides (where the first attempt to introduce Christianity resulted in missionaries John Williams and James Harris being clubbed to death within minutes of landing in 1839), related the following:

"Amongst many who sought to deter me, was one dear old Christian gentleman, whose crowning argument always was, 'The Cannibals! you will be eaten by Cannibals!' At last I replied, 'Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honouring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms'."

Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to China, was confronted by a man who contemptuously chided him:

"Now, Mr. Morrison, do you really expect that you will make an impression on the idolatry of the

Chinese empire?' 'No sir,' responded Morrison, 'but I expect that God will!' "

C.T. Studd, missionary to the Congo, presented this parable:

"Remember the miller's donkey . . . the miller, his son and donkey went to the market. The miller rode the donkey all the way and people exclaimed, 'Cruel man, riding himself and making his son walk.' So he got down and his son rode; then people slanged, 'What a lazy son for riding while his poor old father walks.' Then both father and son rode, and people then said, 'Cruelty to animals, poor donkey.' So they got down and carried the donkey on a pole, but folks said, 'Here are two asses carrying another ass.' Then all three walked and people said, 'What fools to have a donkey and not ride it.' So let's go ahead with our work for God and not care what folks say."

Of course, those who endeavour to submit to Bible college or theological training and apply to join a mission will be told by well meaning relatives and friends that they are wasting their lives. Nate Saint's response to this should be our own:

"And people who do not know the Lord ask why in the world we waste our lives as missionaries. They forget that they too are expending their lives . . . and when the bubble has burst they will have nothing of eternal significance to show for the years they have wasted."

David Brainerd, the 18th century missionary to North American Indians, declared:

"As long as I see anything to be done for God, life is worth living; but O, how vain and unworthy it is to live for any lower end!"

Many reading these testimonies may feel inadequate to follow in the footsteps of such pioneers. It is worth remembering that none of them felt either worthy or capable in and of themselves. However, they were willing to learn and they trusted in God's power, not their own.

Gladys Aylward, missionary to China, expressed her view in this way:

"I wasn't God's first choice for what I've done for China . . . I don't know who it was . . . It must have been a man . . . a well-educated man. I don't know what happened. Perhaps he wasn't willing . . . And God looked down . . . and saw Gladys Aylward . . . And God said - 'Well, she's willing!'"

Isobel Kuhn, missionary to China, issued the following challenge:

"I believe that (in) each generation God has 'called' enough men and women to evangelise all the yet unreached tribes of the earth. . . . everywhere I go, I constantly meet with men and women who say to me, 'When I was young I wanted to be a missionary, but I got married instead.' Or, 'My parents dissuaded me,' or some such thing. No, it is not God who does not

call. It is man who will not respond."

Which raised the point: Over 80% of all missionaries today are women. Where are all the men? What kind of army sends its women into the frontline of battle? Financial considerations, family responsibilities and career demands no doubt play a major role in pre-occupying men, and their personal involvement in fulfilling the Great Commission seems to be "Mission Impossible"!

However, this need not be so. If our congregations would truly make missions a priority then the financial constraints that hold back so many eager volunteers would be swept away. Less than 10% of Evangelical churches have any missions programme at all. Less than 1% of total church income is spent on foreign missions! If churches would set aside at least 10% of their budget to support missionaries, and especially those sent out from their own congregation, then literally thousands more volunteers could be mobilised.

It is a sad commentary on the average congregation that more is spent on carpets, heaters and parking lots than they allocate for fulfilling the Great Commission.

There are so very many ways to serve the Lord in missions today: Bible translations, radio broadcasts, medical work, church planting, literature evangelism, education, administration and so on.

We need teachers and technicians, preachers and printers, computer programmers and church planters, artists and artisans, Bible teachers and brick layers, and many more.

You will not need to worry about "an opening" - there are thousands of kilometres of opening and you can take your choice as to where you will establish yourself.

But you may ask: ***What constitutes a call?***

THE NEED:

"The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few." Matthew 9:37

THE COMMAND:

"Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Mark 16:15

THE LOVE OF CHRIST:

"The love of Christ constrains us, because One died for all . . ." 2 Corinthians 5:14

THE WILL OF GOD:

"The Lord . . . is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9

THE GREAT COMMISSION:

"All authority has been given to Me in Heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded . . ." Matthew 28:18-20

All Christians must pray, most can give, some can go. We must all serve God somewhere. Whether we are called to go across the street or across the world, our mission is the same - to make disciples . . . teaching obedience.

"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said: 'Here am I! Send me.'" Isaiah 6:8

One who answered the call was David Brainerd whose journal included this prayer: "Here I am, send me; send me to the rough, the savage pagans of the wilderness, send me from all that is called comfort on earth; send me even to death itself, if it be but in Thy service and to promote Thy Kingdom."

As C.T. Studd declared:

***"Only one life,
it will soon be past.
Only what's done for Christ
will last."***