

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
STUDY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS**

by

HAROLD R. COOK

MOODY PRESS CHICAGO

**CHAPTER FOURTEEN -
MISSIONARY PREPARATION**

HOW DOES A YOUNG PERSON go about getting prepared for missionary service? The answer to this question is not easy. You see, it depends to some extent on the point in his life at which he makes his decision to volunteer. Maybe he is already near the age limit. Then there isn't much time for special training, though he may already have some training that is useful. But if he makes his decision in his teens, he will have plenty of time to carry out a thorough, well-planned course of preparation.

Still, there are other things to consider. He wants to be a missionary. But what kind of missionary? Maybe he has only a vague idea of what a missionary is and does. Is he to be an evangelistic missionary? An educational missionary? A medical missionary? A technical missionary? Each of these requires special aptitudes and preparation.

The personal characteristics and abilities of the young person enter into the problem, too. Just because you think you would like to be a missionary doctor doesn't mean that you can be one. And don't think that you are fitted for "pioneer work" simply because the stories of such work always give you a thrill.

There are a good many missionary training schools; some good, some not so good. They range all the way from a few months in a so-called "boot camp" to the specialized work in some graduate schools of missions. But none of them does the whole job. They build on a basis of previous training. Some don't have any requirements of previous education. But they still take it for granted that you have had our ordinary public school training. Others have most of their students with degrees from colleges and seminaries. What they are able to do depends both on their own program and on what their students have learned before.

But much of the training for a missionary doesn't come from schools or books. It is gained in other ways. And success in missionary work depends fully as much on this extracurricular preparation as it does on the school work. For a missionary is a witness to CHRIST and to the Christian life. So he must know that life by living it.

There are several things in missionary preparation that we might call indispensables. That is,

they are not only important, but so valuable that to miss them would cause our ministry to suffer. They are things so fundamental that without them there can't be a real missionary ministry at all. They are things we can't do without. Let's take a little time to talk about them. Then I think you will see what we mean.

It may seem strange to say that there is any particular kind of preparation that all missionaries ought to have for all fields. Even more strange to say that there is any type of preparation that is really indispensable for them all. After all, there is a great deal of specialization in missions today. There has to be. And surely the technical specialist doesn't need the same kind of preparation as the evangelistic missionary.

In a sense he doesn't. His training as a technician is quite different from that of the evangelist. But remember that he is a missionary. And if the word missionary is to have any meaning at all, it must mean that those who bear that name have some things in common. It is those things which make them missionaries. It is like those who call themselves Christians. By occupation they may be almost anything. But in that name they are united in a common faith, a common standard of right and wrong, etc.

The true indispensables in missionary preparation are all spiritual. Classroom work plays a part, but it is not effective by itself. It is too easy to learn lessons for an examination without having them affect the course of our lives. We can take the finest course of preparation offered in any school and still be unprepared for missionary service. Some have done it. We need something more, something in addition to the school work.

In general there are four indispensables in the preparation of the missionary.

First, and fundamental to all the rest, there is the training of our inner life - *what we might call spiritual training*. Then there is the training to show forth that life in our relations with others, a matter of vital importance in all missionary service. A third item is, of course, our training in the message we are called to deliver. A missionary is GOD's messenger, so he must have His message well in hand. And last is the matter of experience, *which comes from practice in presenting the message to others*. Experience also brings maturity, that seasoning which we can only get by actually coming to grips with life and living men.

In the vitally important line of spiritual training the least systematic work has been done. The mission boards look for certain spiritual qualifications in those who apply, but the schools don't offer courses in the subject. It may be that we are counting on the churches doing the job. If so, we're making a big mistake. The training given by most churches is quite haphazard. And when several young people offer themselves for missions from the same Church, the amount of spiritual training they have had is never the same.

One candidate, for instance, was born in a devout Christian home. At an early age he accepted the Saviour. Shortly afterward he offered his life for service on the foreign mission field. This allows for years of development before he actually sails. The Bible becomes a familiar book; family devotions and private prayers make their mark on his life; Sunday school lessons, sermons, conferences, Bible camps, young people's societies, all help to foster and strengthen the growth of his spiritual life.

Another, however, did not know of CHRIST's salvation until some time during his college days. He comes from a non-Christian background and has already delved deeply into the sinful ways of the world. But then he allows CHRIST to enter his life and it is transformed. In the enthusiasm of his new-found faith he too volunteers for missionary service. He hasn't the background of the first candidate, but he is not a whit behind him in sincerity of purpose. He may even excel him in warmhearted zeal. He joins the Church and takes an active part in its affairs. He associates with other Christian young people. He takes counsel with his pastor and drinks in avidly the messages that he hears.

Now it is possible that the second young man may outstrip the first in his spiritual development after a time. Then again, maybe he won't. It is something that is hard to prophesy. In any case he is not likely to find that any course has been planned for his spiritual development. Certainly not in college. Even in the seminary they aim chiefly to give him an intellectual mastery of certain truths and to help him gain certain skills. His spiritual profiting will depend mostly on his own initiative and his associations outside of the classroom.

Of all preparatory schools, the Bible institutes seem to have made the most definite provision for training of the spirit as well as the mind. Of course it is not enough. They themselves would be the first to admit it. But it is a part of their plan, and an important one. Student life is more closely regulated than in other schools. There is an emphasis, often repeated, on the devotional life and practical Christianity. Every student is assigned to do some practical Christian service, which makes him exercise the spiritual life he already has and helps him grow. But even so, it is not enough.

What kind of spiritual training does the missionary need? Let me mention briefly a few items with which not many will disagree. Devotional habits are very important - *habits of communing with GOD in prayer and drawing help and instruction and inspiration from His Word.* These are almost the breath of life to the missionary. Now it takes constant and regular repetition to turn an occasional practice into a habit. This is part of our missionary preparation.

With these habits should go the constant application of Christian principles to everyday living. A course in Christian ethics at school is not of much value so long as it is kept in the abstract. The principles don't begin to have real meaning and value until they are applied to definite situations. For instance, it is easy to repeat that all lying is wrong. But it is not so easy to tell the truth when a lie would apparently save you from an embarrassing situation. How do you know the principle is true if you don't apply it? A missionary must be sure!

Also, what good is it to know the theological definition of faith, or to be able to expound Paul's teaching on faith in Galatians, if you don't know how to exercise faith in the affairs of life? There are many times, even in student life, when faith is called for. And do take notice that, to the heathen, religion is fully as much experience as it is theory, if not more so. He won't be interested in any new theory or doctrine that isn't borne out by experience.

Training for your own spirit also comes through learning to deal with others about their soul's needs. Here our first indispensable merges with the others, especially with the second one, the one that deals with our relationship with other people. Personal evangelism is the very cornerstone of missionary work everywhere, and the same preparation of heart that you need for it here at home is what you need in foreign lands. Personal counseling, too, is one of the

missionary's most common jobs, and one of the most demanding. Its principles are pretty much the same wherever you go. And one of those principles is that the counselor must show a real interest in the one who seeks his help. In fact, the missionary needs to be, of all people, one who is unselfishly interested in others, one who is willing to make their burdens his own.

In a missionary's life, too, relationship to others involves the matter of leadership. For whether he wants it or not, people do look to him for leadership. Now some seem to think that leadership is a purely natural gift; that some people are born leaders while others will always be followers. It's perfectly true that some do have an exceptional talent for leadership. But it is not true that all of our leaders come from those talented few. Instead, it is perfectly possible for those who don't have such a gift to develop real ability as leaders. Often all that they need is the opportunity and the encouragement to step out and lead.

We said that missionaries are expected to be leaders. Whether they get proper training beforehand or not, the very circumstances of their life make them take on the responsibilities of leadership. If they have had good training and experience, they can do a creditable job. If not, they will probably become petty dictators. And this will bring harm to the work.

What does leadership training involve? We can give only a limited amount in class instruction; we can explain some of the basic principles and how to apply them. The student can learn more by observing those who lead, by following their example. But more important than either of these is experience in leading. The one who wants to be a leader needs to take every chance to exercise leadership.

Several things are fundamental. The leader needs to have a definite objective; he must know where he is going. He has to be ready to make decisions, and then accept the responsibility for them after they are made. The one who finds it hard to make up his mind, who always hesitates to commit himself for fear he might make a mistake, had better practice making decisions on every possible occasion. He will make mistakes, of course. But his mistakes will be just so many valuable lessons that will help him to make better decisions next time. And the one who doesn't want to take responsibility just isn't material for a missionary.

The one who is to be a Christian leader also needs to learn the lesson that Peter taught, that we are to take the oversight of GOD's flock, not "**as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.**" We show real leadership when we can get others to do what we have in mind, while all the time they are convinced that they are doing what they want.

Our third indispensable has to do with the mastery of the message we bear to others. All too often I have been asked by those who had some special technical training or skill, "Is there a place where I can be used in the mission field?" They usually presume that in missionary work we need laboratory technicians, printers, builders, teachers, nurses, etc. That is all wrong. We need missionaries - young men and young women with a message! They may be educational missionaries, industrial missionaries, medical missionaries; but first and foremost they must be missionaries. As a doctor in the Congo once wrote, "If I thought my job out here was just to heal men's bodies, I would stay at home!"

All of the various types of work in which missionaries engage are proper and useful only as they

contribute to the one great aim of missions. They must be related to the task of bringing CHRIST to the people, of winning them to Him and building them up in Him.

Every missionary must be a man with a message, and he must know that message well. The mission field is no place for the man who has serious doubts about his faith. Neither is it the place for one who is not quite sure just what his message is. He doesn't have to be a finished theologian. He doesn't need to be a profound student of the prophetic Word. But he does need to know the essential elements of his faith and be fully persuaded of their truth. He does have to show to people that he has a working knowledge of the Scriptures. And he must be able to show them how that message touches their lives.

Remember that the people to whom the missionary goes are not ignorant. They may be illiterate, but that is quite another thing. There are often among illiterate people some of the keenest minds to be found anywhere. And they are remarkably acute in their evaluation of the missionary. They may overlook his halting speech, his apparent lack of logic in some of the things he says, and even his ignorance of some things that don't have too much to do with his work. But two faults are inexcusable: a failure to know his message, and an insincerity in professing what he doesn't fully believe or practice.

Bible training, then, is indispensable to all missionaries, no matter what their type of service.

Our final indispensable is experience in presenting the message. We have already said something about maturity in the spiritual life, which comes through experience. We have also spoken of experience in such a matter as the leadership of others. The Bible, too, becomes a living message to others largely to the extent that we who preach it have experienced its power in our own lives. It is remarkable how these indispensable elements in missionary preparation are intertwined with one another. It is only in our thinking that we attempt to separate them. In life they merge into one another.

This matter of experience in presenting the message is very important. Mr. Moody knew its value and stressed it in founding the Moody Bible Institute. He made practical Christian work an integral part of the course of training. It still has that place of importance at Moody as well as in other Bible institutes.

Yet in spite of such experience during their school days, I have had students come to me as they neared graduation and say, "I don't believe I'm ready to go out as a missionary. If I am to be a leader on the mission field I feel that I need more experience in dealing with souls, more experience in meeting the spiritual problems of real life." And some of these young people have gone into home mission work for a short time to get that experience before going abroad.

Such young people have shown a real perception of what it means to be a missionary. On the mission field you are not reciting lessons. People don't quiz you on the subjects you had in school and allow you to show why you got top honors in theology or Church history or some other such subject. In fact, what may disturb the missionary most is their complete indifference to what he has to say, even when they are polite enough to listen while he talks.

You are a missionary. So what? That doesn't mean anything to them except that you are an object of curiosity. Can you engage them in conversation and so direct that conversation that it

will turn to matters of the spirit? It's not difficult in many fields. Other peoples are often more interested in religious matters than are the folks at home. But once you have begun the discussion, can you keep it in the main channel where you can present the Lord JESUS CHRIST in all His desirability? Can you disregard the minor matters and get to the heart of the question so as to reach the heart of the man? It takes practice.

Again, missionary leaders are insisting, "We need missionaries who know how to express themselves!" Well, that is just where experience comes in. You don't learn to express yourself by reading a book or answering a set of true-false questions. You need practice. If, as they say, you "learn to write by writing," you also learn to express yourself by repeated efforts to tell others what is in your mind.

The aim of missions is not simply to proclaim the Gospel. It is to proclaim it in such a way that men will listen to it, understand it, and be moved to obey it. Differences of language don't mean very much in this matter. If you can express yourself in English you will learn to express yourself in an other tongue. If your thoughts are hazy and disordered, and your expression is anything but clear in English, there is no magic in learning another language that will straighten you out. You need this preparation before going to the field.

One last thing. We have mentioned the missionary's need to give counsel on the field, counsel of all sorts. More than anything else, this calls for experience. You need to know people through much association with them. The missionary is no hermit. You need to know something of the forces that move men, the problems that most of them face. It takes experience as well as tact to draw them out and to avoid the pitfalls that go with snap judgments. "Advice is cheap," we say, for there is so much cheap advice on the market. It is given without any background of experience to make it valuable. Yet when a troubled new believer comes to a young missionary with a vital problem, he doesn't want cheap advice. He has come to GOD's messenger and he looks for GOD's message. How humble it should make the missionary feel, and how dependent on God!

These things, then, are indispensable in the preparation of the missionary candidate. Other training is useful, but this is fundamental. Some of it can be given in the school curriculum, and perhaps we can do more along that line. Some can be given in the Church, if the Church is alert to its opportunities.

But much of it, in fact the very heart of the whole matter, depends on the individual. The candidate must not expect others to prepare him for the mission field. They will do what they can, but it is limited. On the candidate himself rests the responsibility of such a close walk with GOD, and such a full determination to serve Him well, that the HOLY SPIRIT, the master teacher, can accomplish that indispensable work of preparation which is His own special ministry.

~ end of chapter 14 ~
