

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

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MOODY PRESS CHICAGO

**CHAPTER ELEVEN -  
MISSIONARY QUALIFICATIONS -  
ESSENTIAL**

WE SAID that the individual Christian's first responsibility to missions is to offer himself. However, we added that the requirements for foreign service are such as to rule out a great many who would like to serve as missionaries. They just wouldn't be able to qualify. In this chapter and the next we shall talk about missionary qualifications.

Just what qualifications are needed in the foreign missionary? In general, we may say, all the qualifications that make a good witness for CHRIST in the homeland, plus some others. These others are made necessary because he does his witnessing in a foreign land, under unfavorable circumstances, and with a broader field of operations.

The requirements of an ambassador for CHRIST in a foreign land are very high, and we would do wrong to minimize them. He must perform his ministry in unfamiliar surroundings. He does it through a new language or languages that he has to learn by dint of hard work. He labors among peoples who are often hostile, and whose culture is quite different from his own. His message is open to suspicion, since he is a foreigner. As often as not, he finds that the climate and the living conditions hamper his work and sap his strength. Yet he has to carry on a broad ministry, and that with only a fraction of the equipment and helps that are available in the homeland.

Whatever the mission boards may require, the mission field demands men and women of the highest caliber and exacts the utmost from them.

Contrary to what many think, Christian piety alone is not enough for missionary service. Missionaries are not dreamy-eyed idealists, as the cartoonists picture them. By force of circumstance they have to be realists. They couldn't last long otherwise. Their work makes demands upon every faculty and most of the knowledge they possess, even among primitive peoples.

Yet the most essential qualifications for a good missionary are spiritual. There are others that are valuable, but the spiritual ones are basic. Ten we are going to discuss may not be exhaustive, but

they are characteristics that mark every successful missionary of CHRIST. Do you have them?

(1) Devotion. Whole-hearted devotion to CHRIST and His Gospel is a prime requisite. You can't do without it and be a missionary. You can't win others to CHRIST if your own allegiance is shaky. If you are uncertain about your faith, if you can't say with heartfelt assurance, "**I know whom I have believed**," you had better stay at home. Missionaries are those who are thoroughly "sold" on their faith.

(2) Spirituality. The missionary of CHRIST must be spiritually-minded, opposed to material-mindedness. That is because his chief aims are spiritual. You don't reach spiritual ends by physical means. The missionary can't disregard the physical; it is a necessary part of his life and work. But he dare not let it take the first place. Yet the temptations on the field are as great as at home, if not actually greater, to regard material things too highly. It is not easy, even for a missionary, to seek "**first the kingdom of God and his righteousness**," but it is necessary. The eternal value of the soul - of the things of the SPIRIT - must occupy first place in the mind of CHRIST's messenger to the heathen.

(3) Trust. Some missionaries are called "faith" missionaries. But they are not the only ones who live a life of faith. On the foreign field we are usually far from the ordinary means of human help that we are used to. Sometimes funds and supplies fail. Sometimes illness strikes when no doctor or nurse is in ready reach. The authorities may be against us and the people suspicious and unfriendly. The powers of darkness seem overwhelming. Even in our own hearts we struggle with discouragement, and there are no Christian advisers to whom we can turn for comfort and encouragement. We come to realize that in ourselves we can do nothing.

Have you learned to trust GOD for every need, material and spiritual? You will need to know that lesson to be a missionary. Trust doesn't spring up full-fledged in a time of crisis. You don't get it when you reach the field. Rather, little by little as you look to GOD for the small things and find Him faithful: And there are plenty of chances to learn to trust Him, even in the life of a student. Then when the time of great need comes, your heart spontaneously turns to the One you know can meet every need.

(4) Love. People expect the missionary to be the very embodiment of GOD's love to man. Isn't he sometimes the only representative of the Christian Gospel in a place? And isn't the heart of that Gospel the love of GOD? The love of GOD that sent His Son into the world to die for sinful men is the same love that sends the missionary to make that salvation known.

It is easy to love some people. It is not so easy to love others. But the missionary cannot choose to love just those who are attractive. It is the love of CHRIST that constrains the missionary to go, the love that poured itself out for all of us when we were His enemies. It is the love of CHRIST which the missionary aims to reveal as best he can, pouring out his own life in unselfish devotion to the people to whom he goes. He learns to think of them as "my people." Unless he loves them, he can hardly keep going. Unless he loves them, his work is fruitless.

(5) Moral courage. There are people whose standards of right and wrong are very flexible. They can be bent to fit almost any situation so as to offend no one. There are others who believe that "right is right"; but they don't believe it very audibly. That is, they haven't the courage to stand

up for what they believe. Both types are "easy to get along with." They never stir up arguments.

But such people don't make good missionaries. Firm standards of right and wrong are essential equipment for the missionary. And not only firm standards, but the courage to make them known. He may be called "narrow-minded." That is part of the price for having convictions. "But it is the water in the narrow channel that flows with greatest force."

Not that the missionary needs to be obnoxiously opinionated. We are talking only about right and wrong. Neither does he have to be overly harsh in denouncing sin. The Scripture advises "**speaking the truth in love.**" But the truth must be spoken, sin must be faced frankly and openly, or else he has no ministry worth the name.

(6) Purpose. There is an ailment afflicting many young people today that we might call lack of purpose. They are not sure just what they want to do. They don't know at what goal they ought to aim. So they refrain from any choice, just waiting for circumstances to show them what is likely to be most to their advantage.

Now a temporary uncertainty, especially in making a decision that is likely to affect the whole course of your life, is not serious. You want to be careful. But if you always find it hard to make up your mind; if you habitually show a lack of eager purposefulness; if you don't know what it is to have one great aim to which you bring other interests into subjection, then you won't make much of a missionary.

A missionary must be a man of vision. His vision must be a high and worthy objective toward which he dedicates the whole course of his life. He needs a God-given vision.

(7) Discernment. In this matter again, the true missionary is quite different from his caricature. He is a man of vision but not a visionary. His vision may lead him to see beyond present circumstances, but he dare not be blind to things as they are. The very continuance of his work may depend on his discernment. He must be able to see the real issues at stake in the many problems he faces. In plain language, he needs lots of common sense.

(8) Zeal. A real missionary is rightly a zealot. His zeal doesn't have to be of that effervescent type that shows itself in vigorous demonstrations of emotion. It may be an intense, slow-burning but all-consuming type that drives him steadily on in spite of opposition. But a zealot he is. A lazy, indifferent missionary just has no place on the field. We can do better without him.

(9) Constancy. There are disappointments and discouragements in every field. Perhaps we are more often disappointed with ourselves than with any other one thing. The mission field shows us how weak we really are. And then there comes the temptation to give up.

It's easy to say that if you are sure the Lord sent you there, you won't give up. But there's more to it than that. It's too easy to persuade yourself that you may have been mistaken, or that the Lord may have changed His mind. It's the one who has learned the lesson of constancy who usually holds fast. He has learned to keep on in spite of discouragement. The Lord can depend on him and so can his fellow workers.

You can't enjoy real success without such perseverance. But, like faith, it isn't something you can work up overnight. Instead it is the result of constant practice in dependability: in employment, in studies, in social relationships, in family obligations, etc. Have you come to the place where people can always depend on you?

(10) Leadership. Missionary work calls for leaders. Whether they want to or not, those who go out as missionaries have to take places of leadership. Bringing men to CHRIST is only the beginning. The missionary then needs to lead them on in their spiritual development. He needs to lead them in the formation of the Church. He needs to lead in the training of national workers who will carry on the work. He must break the way in Christian literature and a dozen other lines of work - things that are needed for the full expression and development of the Christian life. So he must have the qualities of leadership - especially initiative and responsibility.

The ten qualifications we have mentioned are essential for good missionary service. Insofar as a missionary is weak in one or another, his work is bound to suffer. They are qualifications that have marked the ministry of the really great missionaries.

But they are extremely hard to measure. How can a mission board tell what amount of each is needed before it sends out a candidate? And can they possibly tell how much he really has? Clearly they are of most use to the candidate himself. He can use them in examining his own heart and life. He can try to strengthen what is weak. *Getting by the board is incidental; he wants to be a missionary!*

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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