

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

by

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**CHAPTER FIFTEEN -**

**MISSIONARY PREPARATION (Continued)**

THERE IS NO ONE COURSE of preparation for all missionary service. There can't be. The things that missionaries do are too varied. Their fields and the requirements of their work are too different.

Two missionaries to Central America took identical courses of missionary preparation. The course included some elementary medical and dental instruction. It might seem that if either one of them needed that training, the other would need it, too. But it didn't turn out that way.

Here is what they told me. One had worked in and around the capital of his country. At the end of his second term of service he said, "I've never had to use a day of that medical instruction I took." The other had his field among the lowland Indians of the Caribbean coast. After an even shorter period of service he said, "With just that little bit of dental instruction, I have already pulled a thousand teeth."

This seems quite confusing. How are you going to know what training to get? How can you tell which course of preparation to follow? Is there an answer that will cover most cases?

There is indeed. It is a three-fold answer. First, there is some training that is indispensable. We have already talked about this. Then, there is some training that is so generally needed that nearly everybody ought to get it. We'll talk about this in a moment. And finally, there is some training that depends on the needs of a particular field or mission; or it depends on your own talents and interests. This last is the most difficult to talk about. Every case is different. Not only do they face different circumstances, but not many young people are really aware of their own abilities and limitations.

Now let's give attention to the more generally needed types of training.

First is the matter of language. We've already said that to be able to express yourself in English is indispensable. To be able to learn to do it in another language is almost as important. There are not very many fields where you can use English effectively in missionary work. Not even in places like Nigeria where English is taught in the schools. Educated people there do learn to

read, write and speak English; but a message in English doesn't mean as much to them as a message in their native tongue. As an educated Filipino said to me one day, "English speaks to our heads; but our own language speaks to our hearts!"

"That's all right," someone will say; "you ought to do a good job studying the language on the field. But what can you do about it here in the homeland? How can you fit it into a course of preparation? Our schools don't teach many languages."

That's perfectly true. There aren't many cases where you can study here the language you will use in the field. But that's no excuse for omitting language study completely from your course of training. In fact, some mission boards will insist that you have some language study before they consider your application. They want to know if you're likely to be able to learn another language. Besides, the study of any other language than our own has real value. It helps us to see that differences of language are not just differences of words. They are different ways of thinking and of expressing thought. If you have once learned one foreign language you will find it much easier to undertake others.

It isn't hard to get a foreign language in your course of preparation. Nearly all our high schools provide training in one or more foreign languages. As likely as not, you will have to take one in order to enter college. And you may have to take two years in some language to graduate. Some Bible institutes also offer foreign languages.

For missionaries it is usually best to choose the modern languages. That is because they are actually spoken today. They are usually taught in a somewhat different way from the dead languages, with more emphasis on pronunciation and conversation. But in some cases the dead languages may be more useful. If you are going to do translation work, that is, translation of the Bible, then study Greek and Hebrew. It will help you do a better job.

Sometimes you can study at home a language that you will use on your field. Then do it. You can get Spanish in nearly all of our high schools and colleges. And Spanish is what you will use in most of Latin America. French is also taught in most of our colleges and in many high schools. You will need French in large parts of Africa. Portuguese is not so commonly taught, but it is given in a number of schools. It is useful for Brazil and for the large Portuguese possessions in Africa. In fact, no matter where you learn it, you are going to have to know Portuguese before you will be admitted to Angola or Mozambique. The language requirement for French Africa is not quite so strict, but some day it may be. The missions themselves make a practice of sending their missionaries first to France or Belgium for language study before they go on to French Africa or the Belgian Congo. If you need another language, such as Japanese, Chinese or Arabic, you will have a harder time getting it. There are not many schools that teach these languages.

There was a time when many missionaries advised against the study of a native language in the homeland. Some of them still do. They usually mention two reasons. One is that you don't learn the language correctly, especially when it comes to pronunciation. You need to live among the people to get it right. The other is that you start talking on the field before you know the people and know what is wise to say.

There is a good deal of truth in both these reasons. The trouble is that their importance has been

exaggerated. That is, in spite of our better methods of language teaching, it is still true that many foreign language teachers don't really speak well the language they are teaching. They learned it in school themselves and never had to use it in everyday life. But they make most of their mistakes in pronunciation and idiom. They are usually able to give a good foundation in grammar.

Now when you take a language in school, you don't usually get enough of it to develop any very fixed habits of pronunciation. That is, any bad habits are not so fixed that you can't readily correct them later. On the other hand, see what our actual experience has been. Some missionaries have studied the language before going to the field. And in no case has it been a hindrance to them. Instead, they have usually been able to take part in the work sooner than others.

Also it is true that a new missionary who knows how to speak the language might possibly say some unwise things. It's possible, but it doesn't often happen. The reason is that he is usually afraid to say very much. Nearly every new missionary has to be encouraged to talk. He is even afraid to go out on the street for fear someone will talk to him, and he may not understand.

Missionaries often do make slips of the tongue. But it is not just the new missionaries. Neither is it noticeable that those who learned some of the language at home make any more than the others.

We have said that some people exaggerate the disadvantages of studying the language in the homeland. We don't want to go to the other extreme and exaggerate the advantages. There are some advantages. They are very real advantages. They warrant your taking classes in the language while you are preparing for the field. If the course is a concentrated one, it might even warrant delaying your departure so as to take it. But don't spend a year or more after you are ready for the field just taking one of our ordinary language courses. You can do better on the field.

Here are some of the advantages of studying at home. First, it will give you a grasp of the grammatical foundations of the language. Then it won't be entirely strange and confusing to you when you first get to the field. Those first days are confusing enough, with all the new things you have to learn and get used to.

Then, such study will take you through the first period of discouragement. There always comes a time when you think you will never get the language, a time when you wonder how anyone could ever learn to talk such stuff. Better to undergo that first discouragement here than out there.

A third advantage is that the study may shorten your stay in the language school. This means that you will be able to take part in the work sooner. It will save time and money for you and your supporters.

And we haven't said anything about the attitude of the people to whom you go. You will find that they deeply appreciate those who can speak to them in their own tongue from the beginning, even though imperfectly.

Perhaps we ought to note what the British government does with its young men for the colonial service. It sends them to the School of Oriental and African languages in London to get training in the language they need. In fact, the school itself owes much to the co-operation of the government. Yet, if anything, the missionary has greater need than the civil servant for such training.

But there are many languages that can't be studied in the homeland, especially in the United States. Some of them are not taught in our schools. Some have not yet been reduced to written form. For missionaries who go to places where these languages are used, other courses are available.

A course in general phonetics, particularly if it has a missionary slant, is valuable for all missionaries.

Phonetics deals with the sounds of human speech. In such a course you learn about the various speech organs. You learn how to make most of the common speech sounds and how to recognize them when you hear them. Also you learn how to describe and classify them.

If you are dealing with a well-known language, phonetics helps you to learn its sounds more quickly and to produce them more accurately. If you come in contact with an unwritten language, it enables you to distinguish the sounds it uses and to reproduce them. It also gives you an accurate way of writing down words and phrases so you can use them later and teach them to others.

Most missionaries will not really need more than the course in phonetics. But those who are going to give much of their time to linguistic work on the field, especially those who reduce languages to writing and translate the Bible, will need much more. Without doubt the most useful training of this sort for missionary candidates is that provided by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Camp Wycliffe). You can take the foundational course in one summer session of a little less than three months of intensive work.

A second type of training quite generally needed is in the line of medicine. That is, it is medical instruction for the average missionary, the one who does not intend to be a doctor or a nurse.

Every missionary ought to know the elementary things about anatomy and physiology, hygiene, first aid and care of the sick. Competent medical help in many fields is still all too little, and too widely scattered, to take care of all the needs. The missionary ought to know at least how to care for himself and his family in ordinary circumstances, and he ought to know how to care for an emergency until he can get a doctor.

Another thing. In some cases, where the law permits, the non-medical missionary can treat illnesses among the people as far as his knowledge and ability go. He knows he is not a doctor. But when no doctor can be had, he does what he can. The need for this medical work by non-medical missionaries is getting less and less. There are many more fully trained doctors than there used to be, both missionary and native. But there are still some places where the need is likely to continue for some years.

Just how much medical training is advisable for the general missionary? This is a matter on

which there is no general agreement. Too much depends on the particular field, the government restrictions, and even the personality of the missionary. The amount of training that might prove very useful to one missionary might even be dangerous for another with less discretion. But everyone ought to get instruction in the basic subjects we mentioned above: anatomy and physiology, hygiene, first aid and care of the sick. For tropical lands it is good to know something about the more common tropical diseases and how to treat them.

A third type of training, which is even more generally needed, is training in teaching. We are not talking here about those who are going to give full time to teaching. Every missionary is a teacher. No matter what his special ministry may be, he is usually called on to do some teaching. He may be teaching printing, or nursing, or carpentry; or he may be teaching the Bible and theology. But whatever his ministry, teaching is a part of it. He is never just a workman. He is one who inspires and teaches others to do what he does.

So each missionary ought to take some training in the principles of teaching. His training doesn't have to be as complete as that of the professional teacher, but it should give him a grasp of the fundamentals. Besides, he ought to get some experience in teaching. If he can get it under the direction of a skilled teacher, so much the better. But if not, he ought to get the experience of teaching, anyway.

For a fourth type of general preparation we are going to mention bookkeeping and business management. It may amaze some that these subjects are considered important for most missionaries. Yet mission leaders have been urging the matter for many years. We are not concerned here about the general accounts and business affairs of the whole mission. For such things the mission can usually get someone with special training and experience.

But every mission station has its own accounts to keep and business affairs to handle. Building, repairing, hiring laborers of all sorts require some ability in business affairs and accounts. Schools, Bible institutes, and even "bush" schools make the same demands. And so do such things as hospitals, printing plants, Colportage work and even Bible conferences. Many a mission treasurer has groaned over the seeming inability of some missionaries to keep simple accounts and make intelligible financial reports.

What is needed for the individual missionary is not a complete business course, though that has its value. But he does need the principles of bookkeeping. He can take that in high school and in some Bible institutes. And he ought to have some business experience. Training in business management of the simple sort the missionary needs is not so available as bookkeeping. But if he can't get a regular course in it, he will usually find that a little business experience is a great asset.

## **SPECIALIZATION**

Specialization is the order of the day in our American civilization. Men concentrate their studies not just on one field of knowledge, but on a fragment of one portion of that field. Such intensive work has produced great results in the field of the physical sciences. Many people don't see why it wouldn't do just as well in the mission field.

Perhaps it might. That is, if the missions had enough money to employ the large staff of specialists they would need in any one field. And if there were enough trained specialists volunteering for the work. And if people didn't insist on looking at themselves as individuals instead of a collection of characteristics, and at the Gospel as a whole Gospel for a whole man. But these conditions don't exist.

Complete specialization in missions is out of the question. There are some specialists, some who give their whole time to just one phase of the work. But the majority of missionaries have to be ready to take on various kinds of work. They are not jacks-of-all-trades, but they can't limit themselves to just one, either. There is so much to be done and so few to do it that sometimes the missionaries pray, "Lord, deliver us from the specialist, the fellow who won't do whatever needs to be done!"

Yet because specialization is normal and valuable, there has always been some of it in missions. Every missionary has some things that he does better than others, some interests that attract him more than others. No matter to what job he is assigned, he will always find time and place for his special interest. Also, there have always been certain types of work that demanded the full-time services of specially trained workers. And present conditions have increased that need for specialization.

So if you want to be a missionary, keep these things in mind. First, most missionaries have to do more things than the one they like to do most. Second, if you have real talent and training in a line that is useful to the work, sooner or later you will have a chance to make use of your specialty. Third, in some specialized fields your chances to be used full time are quite broad, while in others they may be very limited.

Medical work more and more calls for the fully trained, full-time doctor or nurse. There are still a few places where the non-medical missionary can give some medical help, as we said before, but the number is rapidly decreasing. On the other hand, the demand for well-trained missionary doctors always exceeds the supply. Nurses, too, are generally needed. But not in all fields. There are some fields where foreign doctors are not allowed to practice. There are others where the local doctors can meet most of the need. So the medical missionary candidate has to expect some limitation in his choice of field. He may not get to go to the place he first chooses.

Teaching is another specialized field that often calls for the full-time services of trained men and women. There are many kinds of teaching, and not all are carried on in any one field or mission. The teaching and directing of primary schools is of course the most common, if we don't count the Bible schools. Teaching on the high school and college level offers fewer opportunities, but the supply of teachers is still short of the demand.

Printing is carried on by many separate missions as well as by several missions working together. It usually calls for a full-time printer, who will also train and supervise native help. Trained men are very important in this work, and they are usually in demand. But you may have less choice of field than in the case of doctors and teachers.

As we get into other technical fields, we find the opportunities even more limited. Full-time builders are needed, but only by the larger missions. The same is true of business managers. Laboratory technicians can be used where there are hospitals. Airplane pilots usually need to

double as mechanics. They can be used in a limited number of fields where special needs call for missionary aviation.

Radio technicians are needed by the few missionary radio stations. They are also needed where a mission has set up a short-wave communications system between its stations. Agricultural experts are very useful in some fields, as well as teachers of the crafts. And there are other useful specialties too many to mention. You can see, though, that full-time service in any one of these specialties may be limited to certain fields and missions.

There is another type of specialization that we ought to deal with. It is the type that we can best illustrate by speaking of literary work. Very rarely does a mission send out a new missionary with the express purpose of doing literary work in another language. Instead, when anyone is set aside for this ministry, he is usually a veteran missionary.

The reason is simple. Training in the United States is for an English-speaking American public. It is good as far as it goes. But it usually takes some years for any man to learn another language well enough to produce a literature in it. Besides, the missionary doesn't have to learn just the language.

He has to learn the people. He has to know what needs to be written and how. He needs to know how the people think, what the background is for their beliefs and actions. He needs to write, insofar as he can, from their point of view. This calls for experience in the land and with the people. There are other specialties like this, too, that are best developed on the field.

It is a weakness in most of our courses of preparation that so many of the students have no other purpose than just "to be a missionary." If we ask, "What kind of missionary?" their answers are very vague.

***To be well prepared, a missionary candidate should find out as soon as possible in what kind of service the Lord can best use him. He may have major and minor interests, but he does need to have objectives. He needs to realize that evangelism is itself a specialty and that it takes special preparation. How can he say that he expects to be an evangelistic missionary if he hasn't learned to do personal evangelism? Or hasn't learned to preach in his own tongue? Or isn't on familiar terms with the Gospel message? Or shrinks from contact with new people?***

And if the prospective missionary wants to be used in one of these other ways, he should definitely prepare himself for that service to the best of his ability.

Medical missionaries need to be fully qualified to practice in this country before they are sent abroad. Teachers usually need to be certified at home. In addition, for both of them there may be other requirements in the field to which they are going. They would both have to take courses in Belgium, for example, before going to the Belgian Congo.

And for each one of the technical specialties the missionary should get the best of training. Those who handle airplanes, for instance, need more than a private pilot's license. A sound aviation program calls for a pilot with at least a commercial license, and usually a license in aircraft and engine maintenance.

We can't go further into the matter of specialized preparation. But we do need to remind ourselves again that training in these specialties doesn't exempt a candidate from the basic preparation required of all missionaries. They are missionaries, too. They must be motivated by the same spirit as the evangelistic missionaries. Otherwise the work will suffer. Experience has shown us that each new worker added, if he is not a real missionary, dilutes the spiritual effectiveness of the work. We need specialists, but missionary specialists.

~ end of chapter 15 ~

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