

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

by

HAROLD R. COOK

MOODY PRESS CHICAGO

CHAPTER THIRTEEN -

MISSIONARY QUALIFICATIONS (Concluded)

BESIDES ITS PHYSICAL and educational requirements, the mission is always interested in the personality of the one who seeks appointment.

Our present-day use of the term "personality" is very hard to define. It seems to be the total effect of our manner of acting upon others. So we say a man has no personality if he fails to make any deep impression, either good or bad, on others. He has a good personality if his good qualities, as we see them, impress us more strongly than his bad ones. And a bad personality is just the reverse.

These things don't have to bear any relation to reality. The man with the good personality may be a scoundrel of deepest dye, and the one with no personality may have the strongest character of the lot. We are dealing only with the outward appearance and the impression it makes on others. The Scripture recognizes this difference between the reality of an action and the impression it makes on others. It says, "**Let not then your good be evil spoken of.**" It urges us both to do good and to see that the impression is good.

A bookkeeper doesn't have to worry about the impression he makes on anybody but the boss. The main thing is to have his records neat and accurate. That's not true of the salesperson, however. The volume of his sales and the commission he gets may depend on such impressions. A research scientist may be a very disagreeable person to meet, at the same time that he is highly regarded for his contributions to science. But a minister of the Gospel can't even get a hearing for his message if he continually rubs people the wrong way.

The missionary, of all people, needs to make the right kind of impressions. He not only has to get a hearing for his message, but that message is so tied in with his own life that the impression of his life and the impression of the Gospel are likely to be the same thing. Then, too, his whole ministry revolves around his relationship with other people. He can't do his work in a corner.

Even such a scholarly task as the translation of the Bible requires contact with the people. The translator has to immerse himself in the life of the people until he can express the living message of the Bible in the living tongue that they use every day. He has to draw out from them the words

that he needs, with infinite patience and understanding. But he can't do it until he wins first their confidence.

Then add to these things the fact that the missionary must both work and live with other missionaries under conditions that are not the best. And this relationship is not one that he can terminate on two weeks' notice.

No wonder the mission is very much interested in the personality of its candidates.

If you ask what elements in the personality are the most important, no one can say. Perhaps no two missionary leaders would agree on a list of them. Even when there is fairly general agreement on one trait, we have to admit that there have been some outstanding exceptions. That is, there have been some who lacked that trait, or were weak in it, and still made good missionaries.

The reason is that personality is not a collection of independent traits. It is a composite in which the many traits are fused together into a whole being. We like one man and we dislike another without stopping to analyze their personalities and determine just what elements we like or dislike in them. When we weigh them in the balance of our likes and dislikes, we never estimate just how much generosity it takes to counterbalance an ounce of jealousy. We just react to the total impression they make on us.

It is to get that total impression that some missions don't depend wholly on the questionnaires they send to the candidate and his references. The questionnaire only deals with definite and specific items. They don't even depend on a few personal interviews, which are more general and allow them to get some personal impressions. But they try to arrange for a longer personal contact with him in the affairs of daily life. They invite him to spend a time in the mission home - maybe a week or so, maybe a longer period. There he lives, works and studies with other candidates. They see how he gets along with others. They get a general view of his personality.

There are some things about the personality of the candidate that the mission is particularly interested in. Sometimes they ask questions of the references; sometimes they get the answers in other ways. I have stated the questions so that the preferred answer is obvious. Then the candidate can look them over, check his own weaknesses and perhaps make some improvements.

- (1) Does the candidate have real strength of character? Or does he usually run along with the crowd and let others make his decisions for him?
- (2) Is he self-centered, or does he take a real interest in the affairs of others?
- (3) Is he easily discouraged by difficulties? Does he usually finish what he begins?
- (4) Does he work well when not under supervision? Can he be depended on to fulfill all his obligations?
- (5) Is he usually tactful and reasonable, even under moderate stress? Or does he easily lose his head?
- (6) Does he have a good supply of common sense?
- (7) Does he show the initiative and willingness to take responsibility that a leader needs?
- (8) Is it difficult for him to co-operate with others, or to obey those in authority?
- (9) Does he readily adapt himself to new situations?
- (10) Has he learned to endure hardness without complaint?

- (11) What about his emotional stability? Is he given to fits of despondency? Does he have a good sense of humor?
- (12) Can he stand criticism, and even ridicule?
- (13) Is he willing to serve in any capacity if necessary, no matter how humble?
- (14) Does he have a teachable spirit?

Now a word about Christian life and work as a qualification.

The spiritual qualifications we began with are essential for missionary service. But, as we said, the mission board would find it hard to evaluate them. For practical purposes they inquire into certain definite matters about the candidate's life and experience.

Of course they want to know first of all if he has given evidence of real Christian life and character. They ask this of his references and any others who may know him.

Then they want to know from the candidate if he has any definite convictions about the missionary call, motives and purposes. Why does he want to be a missionary?

In the matter of beliefs there is quite a difference of procedure. Some missions require the candidate simply to sign the doctrinal statement of the mission. Some want an independent statement from the candidate himself in his own words. Some quiz him on certain special items. The whole purpose is to make sure that he is in harmony with the fundamental principles of the mission.

Experience in Christian work is very important. The missionary shouldn't go out as a novice. If he hasn't learned to serve CHRIST and to win souls in his homeland, he isn't ready for overseas service. Sometimes a mission will even recommend that he have a short period in the pastorate or in the home mission field before he is approved to go abroad.

One last question is frequently put to the candidate in somewhat this form: "What are your devotional habits (Note that we say habits, not occasional practices.)" Our devotional practices are very deliberate in their beginning, and the atmosphere in which most young people live is not very conducive to keeping them up with regularity. It is only through constant repetition over a long period of time that they become habitual. Then they show the mold into which the spiritual life has been cast.

Engagement and marriage must next be considered.

It may seem strange that the matter of engagement and marriage should come under the heading of qualifications for missionary service. But it has a definite bearing on the subject. In considering the qualifications of a candidate, the mission always wants to know whether he is married, engaged or single. It makes a difference. They don't want single missionaries for some kinds of work. For others they do. They may even consider that some candidates would be acceptable if married; otherwise not. And of course if there are children it may influence the decision.

The great majority of missionaries are married, either before leaving for the field or at some time, afterward. The mission seldom makes it a requirement today, but it figures on it as the

usual thing. In some cases it may even prefer married couples. This is especially true in places where custom demands that all women must have husbands and any unattached woman is not respectable. But marriage does present some problems that each Candidate needs to understand.

There are some very real values in having a missionary family on most fields. So the mission, as such, is not usually opposed to marriage or families. Neither does it presume to judge whether the young man's intended is the right one for him. That is a purely personal matter. But these things do have an effect on the work. And that is what concerns the mission. Let's see if we can make the problems clear.

One of the problems became especially acute shortly after World War II. That war interrupted or postponed the training of many young men for missionary service. On their return from military service, after several years of absence, it was only natural that many of them should decide to get married before continuing their training. The government itself favored such an arrangement by increasing its educational allowance to those who had wives and families.

In time these young couples applied for appointment to the mission field. One day the director of a large mission said to me, "What are we going to do with these young couples who apply to us with three or four children? We don't want to turn a man down simply because he has a family. But you can see the problems it raises."

Of course I could. It means a much larger expenditure for outfit and passage. It means more support on the field during the long months of learning the language, getting introduced to the many phases of the work and becoming adjusted. It means not only increased problems of housing during language school days, but also the problem of caring for the children so that the parents may have time for classes and study. It means all the burdens and distractions of caring for a sizable family at the time when the young couple should be giving their attention to getting a grasp of the work.

But in spite of such problems, the missions do send out a number of families, especially where they are very well qualified. The most conservative will accept those with only one child. Others have no set rule and consider each case on its individual merits.

Aside from the problems presented by the children, the candidate ought to understand that the mission usually expects both the man and his wife to be missionaries. Sometimes a mission will appoint a missionary and his wife; but usually they prefer to appoint two missionaries. The wife is expected to measure up to the usual standards of acceptance. Her ministry will not be just the same as if she were single, and it shouldn't make her neglect her family responsibilities, but it is a real ministry. And it requires real ability and good preparation.

What does a mission do when, for health or some other reason, one of the two is not acceptable? What can it do but reject them both? It is a hard decision to make, but it is necessary. It has been made many a time.

For the young couple this may seem like a tragic disappointment. But it doesn't need to be. If you have let the Lord lead you in the choice of your helpmate just as sincerely as in the other affairs of life; if you are sure that He has brought you two together and means for you to be together; then the rejection can only mean that He has another place of service for you. You should

consider such a rejection in the same light as if it had been the rejection of both individuals. For in GOD's sight you two are in truth "one flesh."

It is customary for missions to require that couples be married for at least a year before actually sailing for the field. The major purpose is quite simple, yet important. Marriage involves many adjustments in the lives of the young couple, adjustments they don't often think about ahead of time. Little things like the time for meals, or what to do of an evening, or whether to buy a new rug for the living-room, can no longer be decided by each one individually. And there are a hundred and one other adjustments in the blending of two hitherto independent lives.

Also when we go to foreign lands as missionaries of CHRIST there are many adjustments to make. There is a different climate, different conditions of living, a very different people whose ways of thinking seem strange to us. There is a new etiquette to learn and abide by, a new lack of privacy even in our own home, and a radically new diet to get used to.

To make two sets of adjustments of such a radical nature at one and the same time is too much to require of anyone. In addition, the honeymoon is not the best time for learning a new and difficult language. So at least a year is allowed for adjustment to married life before the adjustment to missionary life is begun.

A similar situation faces those engaged young people who go to the field single, expecting to be married after they arrive. But here it is the adjustment to missionary life that they need to make before they enter into marriage. The mission usually requires them to wait one or two years after they reach the field. That is, they wait until the adjustment to the field has been made and the language has been learned.

There is a further complication for the engaged couples. The mission has found that it is wise to put them in separate stations until marriage. That means they don't have the frequent opportunities to see one another that they enjoyed in the homeland. It also means that one of the stations is going to lose a worker just at the time when he is becoming really useful. Or maybe after marriage they will both be sent to an entirely different station. But this problem is unavoidable.

If you ask whether it is better to get married before going to the field, or wait until after arriving, you will get all sorts of answers. No one will fit all cases. The idea of getting married first is usually the more attractive. But the mission will point out several dangers. There is a danger that you may get sidetracked into some other line of service while you are waiting. Or the arrival of children may postpone your leaving for the field; or it may preclude it altogether. Each candidate has to make his own decision in the light of all the facts, and looking to the Lord for guidance.

~ end of chapter 13 ~
