

So You Want to Be a Missionary!

A Guide to Missionary Preparation

(skill acquisition/pre-field preparations)

1. Character and personality traits of a good missionary candidate

The foundational experiences of a missionary are his assurance of true saving faith in Christ, absolute surrender to the will of God for his life, steadfast devotion to growth in sanctification, and an earnest compassion for lost souls which compels him to tell them of the Savior. The very nature of missionary work necessitates that its participants be self-disciplined and mature in areas of Christian character and conduct. A successful missionary will excel in virtues such as orderliness, punctuality, modesty, meekness, a teachable spirit, and diligence. A missionary must be in possession of a personality that accepts and adapts to change and interruption of plans and goals. He should be able to get along well with others and work in unity for common goals.

No person would be considered for missionary service that has revealed poor character, poor judgment, or a poor personal disposition. While no one fulfills the ideal combination of all of these traits, those who are known to be significantly deficient in any area should be dissuaded from missionary service.

2. Ministry experience of a good missionary candidate

Every missionary should avail himself of every opportunity to learn about serving the Lord before ever arriving on the field. No candidate would be considered who has not consistently demonstrated a zeal for service to Christ in his home church, adopted church (college students), and/or extension ministries. The prospective missionary should not refuse the chance to acquire new skills or experience new means of ministration. Situations affording training in ministry to all different ages should be sought. Ministry to the least evangelized should be complemented with ministry to the aged saints. Experience serving in the nursery should be gained, along with that of consoling the grieving and visiting the sick. In brief, a missionary candidate should learn to shepherd people. He should not disdain any adventure that will broaden the scope of his knowledge of and skill in service for the Lord.

3. Language proficiency of a good missionary candidate

Because much missionary activity takes place in an environment where the missionary's native language is not spoken and because effective communication is endemic to effective fulfillment of the great commission, great value should be placed on language proficiency. Good missionaries do not just "get by" in the adopted tongue; they excel in it. Of course, not every person has the same natural talent for languages, but every good missionary should be equally dedicated to and diligent in learning the *lingua franca* to the best of his ability, whether it be English or a remote tribal dialect.

4. Specific skills acquired by a good missionary candidate

- ✓ Conflict resolution procedures – Learn to get along with parents, siblings, roommates, employers, co-workers, and peers. A successful missionary is one who learns how to work his way through inter-personal conflicts rather than retreating from them or ignoring them.
- ✓ Communication skills with children, teens, and adults – Learn to effectively relate eternal verities to people of all ages. People learn differently at different stages in life. Therefore, comprehension must be obtained on how to best transfer your understanding of Biblical truth into the hearts and minds of those in your audience.
- ✓ Counseling – Learn to assist people in differing circumstances to appropriate Biblical precepts and principles into their lives. Discover methods and techniques for responding Biblically to people in crisis situations.

- ✓ Cross-cultural communication – Once the basics of communication to various ages of people are mastered, there is a further need to learn how to develop the process whereby one can overcome barriers established by a disparity of cultural backgrounds and effectively transmit spiritual concepts. This involves learning to recognize the values and norms of the receptor culture. It includes understanding its native religions and philosophies, something of its political scheme, as well as its endemic superstitions and prejudices. The communicator must learn to phrase the Truth of the Gospel in a manner that invites, rather than repels, conversation. In a certain sense, almost all communication is on some level cross-cultural. But in the traditional missionary use of this terminology, the general variation between the national culture of the missionary and the national culture of the native on the field is in view. Therefore, a complete immersion into cross-cultural experience is by definition not possible without relocation to a foreign land. However, laboring among established minority populations within the host culture can demonstrate the rudimentary elements of cross-cultural communication. In other words, it would be advantageous to attempt to minister among ethnic minority groups here in the United States. At the very least, this will offer exposure to a differing worldview and set of cultural norms. Learning to reach the hearts of people who are different from one's self is a fundamental priority of missions.
- ✓ Personal evangelism in various contexts – Along the lines of cross-cultural communications is the objective of gaining experience in evangelizing people from a variety of religious traditions and philosophical perspectives. Read about and practice sharing the Gospel with Jews, Muslims, Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhists, Atheists, etc.
- ✓ Discipleship of new converts – A large portion of the missionary's ministry is devoted to grounding converts in the principles of the Scriptures. Any experience that a prospective missionary can gain in this activity will prove beneficial in his future work. Opportunities to have one-on-one times of training for converts should be zealously sought after. Any one of a number of fine discipleship guides can be used to conduct the disciple through the rudiments of the Christian life.

5. Preparation for service with missionary agency

- ✓ Become acquainted with agency through its missionaries or representatives – Take advantage of opportunities to converse with missionaries affiliated with a certain board or with an official representative of the board. Learn why the board exists and what kind of people they are looking for to serve with them on the mission field.
- ✓ Understand the philosophy, purpose, policies, and procedures of the agency – Obtain and examine a copy of the board's statement of faith, promotional brochures and literature, and policies manual.
- ✓ Visit the agency's headquarters to gain an understanding of its operations – Once a person is comfortable with the philosophy and practice of a board, he should learn more about the specific functions the board performs. What will the board do for him as a missionary? What will the board expect of him? How will his relationship with this board affect his daily ministry on the field?
- ✓ Undergo the application process – Upon finding a board that a candidate feels is well suited to him, he should submit a formal application for association with them. Different boards have different procedures for processing applications, but most will carefully check all references and conduct as thorough a research as possible about the candidate. Interviews will follow, and in some cases, a formal period of candidacy will be scheduled during which the aspirant must demonstrate his suitability for missionary service.