

## MISSIONARY LIFE

My topic is Missionary Life. So what do you think it's like to be a missionary? Perhaps it would be very interesting to find out from you what you think missionary life is like after you've watched the life of missionaries among you.

Perhaps you might give us missionaries some pretty humbling impressions. Sometimes God's people think that missionaries are a "different breed of humanity", almost like angels -- but without their wings (though they often have to fly!).

I remember when we were missionaries in Indonesia, we had a young school teacher from New Zealand come and stay with us for some weeks. One of his comments after this time was that he discovered that missionaries were "real people". Well, I wonder what he had seen. Certainly he'd seen real people, with difficulties and struggles.

One thing he found out was that missionaries have emotions. Just before he arrived, our entire family had been involved in a near boat tragedy. We were in a small boat that capsized in the middle of the bay. Several hours later after hanging on to the upturned boat, we were rescued. But I well remember one time when he was staying with us, how I broke down sobbing for minutes while recounting this experience to some other missionary friends.

And I'm sure that he found out very quickly that we parents could become impatient with our kids and our kids could be naughty like normal kids.

So what is missionary life like? In reality? If God called you to become one of His servants to take the Gospel to another people or nation, what would life be like for you? Would it be mostly fun? Or would it be boring? Would it be easy or difficult? Would you be able to do what you'd like to do?

### **What is missionary life *really* like?**

Let's make a very brief statement about what "mission" means. Mission is a word that is found often in the Bible, especially in the NT. "Mission" comes from a Latin word which is a translation of the Greek word "apostle" & *apostello* (= "to send").

It all has to do with God's purpose that His good news be heralded among the nations -- to extend His kingdom to the ends of the earth. To take captives from every tribe and nation to be

His chosen possession. And God accomplishes His purpose through choosing and sending out messengers or ambassadors to all nations bearing a clear witness to the Lord Jesus and calling men and women everywhere to repent and believe the Gospel..

Let's find out from Jesus' life what it was like to be a missionary. You see, Jesus was the great Apostle. See Heb.3:1. He was sent down from heaven on God's mission - to liberate the captives, to redeem the slaves, to save the lost, to become both the High Priest who sacrifices an acceptable sin offering for all men as well as the Lamb that was sacrificed to reconcile sinful man to a holy God. He served God faithfully and accomplished His mission.

At the end of His mission, Jesus said: "As the Father has sent me, even so send I you." (John 20:21) Earlier Jesus had sent His first disciples on short-term missions (cf. Matt.10; Luke 11). Then when He had finished His Father's work, He commissioned His followers to go to all the nations. He sent them out as "apostles" or "missionaries" -- His servants to continue to work that He had started Himself. See Matt.28:18-20.

They weren't to stay behind and just enjoy each other or the comfort of a life where they had few threats from outsiders. Rather Jesus sent His people out into the world. He commanded them to go out among lost men and women and to call them to become His followers -- to receive the riches for which He had made Himself poor (see 11 Cor.8:9).

This is Jesus' command to His people until He returns to the earth. See Matt.28:20 "... until the end of the age." All His people going to all nations ("people groups"), teaching all things He has commanded us, with the promise of His presence always -- to go forth from their own people taking His Good News to other peoples far and near. Australians going to Central Europe or to the aboriginal peoples in the country regions of Australia.

So we can say that Jesus our Master continues to send out missionary workers -- long term and short-term -- right to this very day.

And when a missionary gets to where God sends him, what kind of life will he or she live? If God calls YOU to go -- and He may -- what can you expect to happen?

The easiest way for us to answer that is to take a close look at Jesus' experience and also at the apostle Paul's life and experience. Let's take note of six different aspects of missionary life from the experience of Jesus as told us in Phil.2:5-11.

**Firstly, missionary life begins with LEAVING BEHIND. See Phil.2:6.**

For Jesus. He counted the cost of leaving His Father and all the great many privileges of living in heaven. He had to leave all these behind in order to do the work that His Father was sending Him to do. This involved much sacrifice. We cannot think of this as being without pain for Jesus. And also for His Father.

For the apostle Paul, it meant leaving behind all sorts of comforts and exposing himself to almost continual threats upon his life and to the many discomforts of travel in his day, even to being without food. (See 2 Cor.11:22ff.)

To be a missionary involves a LEAVING BEHIND -- parents & family, loved ones even children. Physically and emotionally. This cannot happen in reality without sadness and sorrow - in our hearts, and also in the hearts of those we must leave.

For our family, we have left home twice. The first time we left our parents, our brothers & sisters, close friends -- and followed the Lord's call to serve Him in Indonesia. My parents who are believers had hoped that we would live nearby -- that they would see their grandchildren regularly just like grandparents normally experience. They wanted us to do Christian work near to them. They used various arguments like: "Aren't there many people in Australia who also need to hear the Gospel?"

Later after serving in Indonesia for 13 years, we returned to Australia to serve as a local Baptist pastor. But 7 years later, God gave us a new call -- to return to overseas missionary work. For a while we served with OM in Australia but then came His clear call to come to Central Europe. This time we were called upon to leave our children as well as our parents -- at least 3 out of 4 children.

These leaving behind experiences are never easy but neither are they extremely difficult when one knows that we are going out in obedience to God's will and call. In fact, He fills our hearts with joy and peace even though sometimes deep down we feel sad and even lonely -and somewhat isolated from the world of our families and friends.

Missionary life is not only leaving people but also leaving our worldly possessions, leaving possibilities for job advancement, the opportunity to make a lot of money and to have many possessions, etc. See Luke 14:26,27,18:28. cf. Luke 15:4.

Missionary life is forgetting these things -- putting them behind -- giving up of many things that people value most highly in life, in order that we might offer to lost people those possessions that are of eternal value.

God calls us to make the choice between living for ourselves -- enjoying the delights of relationships with our family, making lots of money and becoming well-off in this world, and living for His interests -- and inheriting eternal riches in heaven as well as the enjoyment of a most wonderful relationship with Him as our Master.

This choice is sometimes between the will of God and our own will, at other times between God's plan and the plans of family and loved ones. This is not often an easy choice. But when we make a clear-cut choice and determine by God's grace to stick by it, then we enter into a deep measure of joy. And at each new cross-roads, we aren't swayed into going off course.

**Secondly, missionary life is *IDENTIFYING WITH PEOPLE*. See Phil.2.7.**

Jesus came into the world as a Jew. When people walked down the road, they recognised Him as one of them. He looked like one, kept Jewish customs and spoke like one. It was God's plan for His Son to be a full-blooded man (though without sin) among men so that He might become a perfect sin-offering for man. Regardless of how glorious Christ's experience was before He came to earth, His life as God's Apostle was lived out in close relationships with men -- especially with His chosen disciples.

The apostle Paul also sought to fully identify the real people to whom God sent him with the message of hope. See 1 Cor.9:19-23. To the Jews, he was a Jew so that he might save some. To the Gentiles, he was willing to let go of whatever Jewish customs so that he might also preach the Gospel to them without any hindrance. Wherever he went, Paul sought to identify with people -- to be like any ordinary human being, not like the religious leaders who always expected to be treated differently.

To be a missionary we must be willing to let go of what we hold very dear in order that we can wholeheartedly even if not completely identify with the people God has called us to minister to. This is not easy for us as we all have strong even if hidden feelings of nationalism. We believe that our country, our people, our language, our ways and customs are superior to all others. Missionaries need to change this way of thinking lest such matters become a hindrance or stumbling-block to the people hearing the Gospel.

When Hudson Taylor first went to China as a missionary in the middle of last century, the English missionaries already living there then dressed just like they did back in England in those days. They looked upon the Chinese clothes and customs as being below their dignity. Hudson Taylor believed that these customs and clothing styles put a big barrier between the missionaries and the Chinese. So he chose to have his hair cut, to wear a Chinese pigtail and to wear traditional Chinese clothes. Other missionaries laughed at him but he persevered. The result was a strong identification with the nationals that gave him and his co-workers (whom he required to do the same) many open doors for the Gospel. And hundreds of churches were founded as a result of their strong identification with the Chinese wherever they went.

Living in the footsteps of Jesus, the great Apostle, demands that we identify with people God sends us to -- for the sake of the Gospel -- in order that they might hear the Good News in their own language and in ways that will make the message plain and simple to them.

But when God sends you out, the truth is that you can really enjoy identifying with the people. This has been our experience. It hasn't been a hard or overly painful thing to become "Indonesian". We learnt to love the Indonesian people, their culture, their food, their customs. We enjoyed living in simple Indonesian homes. The heat and the traffic was sometimes a trial but even in these hardships, God gave us joy.

The clear message is that God helps us to identify with the people. He helps us look or see beyond the inconveniences and to delight in becoming more like the local people. To enjoy learning a new language and to sharing God's truths clearly in their language. Certainly we found that God both helped us to identify by giving us a clear sense of purpose -- we weren't there to talk about how wonderful our country and our customs were but to speak about God's kingdom and about how wonderful He is.

**Thirdly, missionary life includes *THE WORK OF SERVICE*. See Phil.2:7 "taking the very nature of a servant".**

The work of a *doulos* (= "slave") in Jesus' day and in Paul's day was anything but nice, easy, relaxing work. it was hard, incessant work. Work from morning to night. At any time according to the will and desire of the lord or Master.

For Jesus, from the very beginning, He spoke about the work that He had come to do. See John 4:34; 5:17,36. Before He went out among the crowds and proclaimed the kingdom of God, Jesus worked hard with His human father. He was a builder or carpenter. And then throughout those

three years, Jesus worked hard. He travelled up and down Palestine. He stayed up late at times in prayer, even praying through the night. He rose up early for prayer. For Him, it was the constant pressure of facing people and ministering to their many needs.

The same was the case with the apostle Paul. One can see from Paul's experience that his work was very hard work indeed. It was day and night. It involved not just "spiritual activities or ministries" but also working to provide for his own needs through his profession as a tent-maker (see Acts 20:33-35).

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Missionary work is GOD'S work -- it's serving other people, not serving ourselves and our own wants. The personal search for self-fulfilment has no part in missionary life. It is God's work we are called to go out to do, not our own work under the banner of some missionary organisation.

But just in case any of us might think that this is a dull and boring life, we personally have proven that there isn't any work more enjoyable and fulfilling than the work that God gives us to do -- as we proclaim His Good News to people and as we teach His Word to God's people everywhere. God gives us a deep-seated fulfilment through doing that which reaps eternal dividends.

Serving God for our family has been A FULL-TIME JOB. We have never looked upon missionary life as a "job" -- from 9 am to 5 pm. It's basically our whole lives. Yes, we try to take time to relax and rest but we see our lives and our work as all one big package. And we truly love it.

But it's God's work -- and He gives to us a deep sense of fulfilment in serving Him and His people. There is not more rewarding and satisfying work than God's work -- hard, tough, demanding but giving deep satisfaction and joy.

**Fourthly, missionary life is a life with *TRIALS, SUFFERING AND PAIN*. See Phil.2:8 "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself ..."**

Jesus stooped down from the glories and bliss of heaven and entered into the totality of man's existence with all its pains and trials -- suffering all the limitations, all the pains that men suffer as a part of the fallen condition of this world.

The pain that Jesus experienced was both spiritual, emotional and physical. It was as we've seen, the pain of separation from His Father. He also faced the pain of rejection. See John 1:11. He came to those who belonged to Him but they didn't know Him or recognise Him. They treated Him with contempt. They rejected Him as their Messiah.

Then Jesus' pain also extended to the slowness of His own beloved disciples to understand His words and to believe fully all that He told to them. The pain of not being known for who He was.

And finally, His pain was spiritual and physical beyond what words can describe. He died the death of a criminal. He did not die a martyr's death -- hailed with great glory. He was tried and condemned to die as a criminal and nailed to a Roman cross outside the city wall of Jerusalem. See Heb.1 3:11-14. Such pain can never even be imagined -- the perfect Son of God allowing Himself to be mistreated, condemned and then stripped of all human dignity as He hung naked on the Roman cross.

In this way He fulfilled His Father's mission. It was the Father's will in order that He might provide a way for us sinful mankind to enter into His glory and enjoy His riches for ever. See Isaiah 53:10-12.

We can also see in Paul's life and experiences how God calls a missionary to be willing to suffer for His sake . See 2 Cor.6:3-10;11:21b-29 etc.

Of course, what about modern-day missionaries? What about me? And the other missionaries here today? We cannot possibly compare our sufferings and trials with those experienced by our Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul. Our sufferings are basically of NO SIGNIFICANCE in comparison.

What kind of sufferings and trials are a part of missionary life today? What some Christians think of as the "sufferings" of a missionary include the missionary's physical sufferings. For example, they see that we miss out on lots of things that they consider "essential" to normal living and enjoyment. Yes, it is true that we miss out on some things that they can have and do. For example, we don't always enjoy the same pleasures that they have. Sometimes we miss out on special family events such as weddings. Or we don't have our own room with our own bed and other comforts. We don't have the same amount of money to spend on ourselves -- buying ourselves fancy clothes, taking expensive holidays etc.

But these aren't really sufferings. We consider these to be of little value in comparison with what we receive from God's good and loving hand. If we miss out on some things, then we experience

many other things that are of much greater value and give us far deeper enjoyment. We may not have fancy cars to drive around in. We may not always have a place we can call "home". We may have to move around from place to place.

In reality, God blesses us with so much more than we can ever receive. He blesses us with the joy of new relationships, the joy of giving out the Word of Life to others, the joy of seeing people released from past bondages, and able to begin enjoying life as He intended, the joy of experiencing more of His amazing world (even if we're not there as a tourist), plus, plus.

There are other trials and sufferings that are a part of the missionary's life. We have already mentioned leaving family and friends -- all those relationships that we hold dear . This is often difficult and painful -- both for one who goes out as well as for those who are left behind.

Sometimes a part of missionary life is a kind of persecution from his or her family -misunderstanding and rejection because we are going out to serve God instead of staying behind to keep them company and serve their needs. Sometimes they put pressure on us to do their will and desire. We do not find any of these easy.

Yes, we do experience pain as a part of our missionary life. Like the pain one feels down inside when you're treated like a child by the nationals because you can't yet speak their language correctly. When you make silly mistakes. Or when they laugh in front of your face but you don't know what they're saying -- are they laughing with you or at you?

There is also the spiritual pain as they reject the message you have come to share with them -- even with all the cost of leaving everything dear behind. The pain of feeling rejected by some because we come to them with a message they consider irrelevant.

Also the pain of giving all you've got to the work and then finding that there's very little apparent fruit for our labours. The deep, troubling questions: Am I a failure? Was it really worth all the effort? I've certainly grappled with such questions. I've returned home to Australia wondering if the people really heard what I said. Did they really care?

But once again God gives us the strength to bear this kind of inner pain. He is the God of eternal encouragement and good hope. See 2 Thess.2:16-17. He uses His Word to encourage our hearts and sometimes we hear news of God's blessings that have come through our feeble efforts that appeared to us at the time like one big failure.

So we press on in faith knowing that by God's grace there is no pain, no trial, no suffering that we experience alone -- He is always with us. cf. Acts 18:9-10. And we also know that He is working through these trials -- both for our own benefit and also to accomplish His glorious work even if we have to wait until eternity before we know all He's done through us. But it's worth it all. No work done for Jesus for His glory is ever in vain.

**Fifthly, missionary life involves *DYING*. See Phil.2:8. "Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross!"**

Obviously the death that Jesus died was totally unique -- an experience that no other human being could ever have. His death was unique because He was dying for us and in our place in order to take away our sins by bearing the full measure of God's wrath for our sins in His own body.

For most missionaries their missionary life isn't a literal death, or dying as a Christian martyr although for a few it is. Some though are called to this level of identifying with Jesus. Such as the five missionaries who died in the Ecuadorian jungles in Jan. 1956 seeking to reach the Auca Indians with the Gospel. All were hacked to death, but then their death has been like the seeds falling into the ground which later brought forth new life. ("He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Jim Elliot.) The sister of the pilot of that plane as well as the wife of one of the missionaries continued on in their desire to share God's love with this tribal people. And God blessed their labours and the fruit today is a strong and growing church among these people.

Paul looked upon his missionary life in another way. it was a daily experience of dying. He saw himself laying down his life in order that God's life might come into the people and churches whom he was serving. See 2 Cor.4:10-12; Phil.2:17-18. He didn't really consider his life worth anything to him if only he might finish the course and complete his work -- the work of testifying to the Gospel of God's grace. He died as a martyr but throughout his life, he died daily to his own life so that others might receive God's gift of life through his ministry.

However, there are other ways of "dying" involved in serving as a missionary. For Jesus, it meant dying to His right to be with His Father. He died to this right in order that He might bring life to us. He died daily to his own will in order that He might do the will of His Father. See John 4:34; 6:38-39.

Missionary life is a constant challenge for us to die to our own selfish desires and interests in order that we might bring the gift of life to others -- and accomplish God's people in His Word. Dying to our own self-will and allowing God's will to be perfected through us.

We need to consider this part of missionary life seriously -- both those who are already missionaries as well as all who are weighing up the missionary call. Sometimes we look at mission work romantically -- especially human interest factors like going to other places, like being a tourist in disguise.

Yes, we do get to see other places if God sends us out into missionary work. But we see different things. Our minds are on different realities. We have to live there which means going shopping etc. But our focus is upon deeper things -- the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of people. We don't go out to get but rather to give -and primarily to give ourselves sacrificially, wholly, completely.

For some missionaries missionary life is marked by loneliness. Being without a life's companion -- because they've chosen to follow Christ's call rather than just seek after human fulfilment in a marriage relationship. Or they've chosen for a while -during their youthfulness -- to remain single so that they can serve the Lord on some difficult mission field. To die to a very legitimate desire so that they can obey God's command to proclaim the Gospel to people in spiritual darkness. (Cf. Paul's sacrifice.)

This isn't a calling for everyone or even for the majority of God's servants whom He sends forth to other peoples and nations. But it is a part of the cost that He calls us to consider.

Yes, God calls us to lay down our lives -- for His sake. But once again the joy He gives us far outweighs the temporary pain we experience. It is a spiritual joy -- a joy that is far deeper than the level of happiness that even God's people seek after in this world.

For me personally, the hardest part of dying is what God requires of me every day regardless of *who I am* or where I am. This is the battle of dying to a desire for glory, to have recognition, to have people's love and acceptance, even to become popular or known. To be at peace in being a "nobody". Hardly known by men but certainly known and loved by God.

But God's Spirit keeps reminding me that of the words of Jesus: *"Truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."* (John 12:24-25). This leads me to the sixth and final point ....

**Sixthly, missionary life includes *GOD'S ETERNAL REWARDS*. see Phil.2:9-11.**

Here it is stated so clearly that Jesus received and will receive eternal rewards for all His suffering and agony. God has highly exalted Him. He has been placed on His Throne and given the rulership of all things. And at the end of the ages, all men and women will bow the knee to Him and confess His name upon their lips even those who refused to confess His name in this world. For all eternity, Jesus is honoured and His name exalted because He was faithful in every point to the calling God gave to Him.

Paul also looked forward to the end of His life after he had finished his hard work and endured all the sufferings inflicted upon him. See 2 Tim.4:7-8; cf. Acts 20:24. He longed and waited for that day.

For the missionary who serves faithfully, there are the present and the future rewards. The present rewards include the great privilege of being one of God's co-workers in taking the Good News to another people. No, it isn't all just "apple pie and cream". Sometimes people reject us and the message we proclaim. But deep down in our hearts is a tremendous sense of joy -- participating in God's work, not just doing our own thing.

Too many believers live basically self-centred lives. They try to be good Christians and yet their lives revolve around themselves -- just what they want to do and achieve in life. Their pleasures and interests, not God's. Apart from this displeasing the Lord Himself, it is a life-style that certainly results in them missing out on the wonderful and eternal rewards that God has for us to experience.

The life of a missionary may appear as a life of giving up lots of things -- but that is only for the time-being. In reality, we have found that it is above all a life filled to overflowing with God's blessings -- His joy, the privilege sometimes of watching people in another land respond to the Gospel for the very first time. The joy of helping young believers discover truths in the Word and to begin to blossom in the Christian faith. Like a gardener who plants some seeds and then watches them grow until they produce a wonderful harvest. See Mark 10:29-31.

Whenever God takes something away, He always replaces it with something that is even more wonderful. We may have to say goodbye to loved ones -- we may lose some very special relationships. Even those who were our closest friends back home sometimes lose interest in us as missionaries. That's hard. But then God replaces these old relationships with other new and

very precious relationships -- with new friends in places like Hungary and Romania or wherever He sends us around the world. And these relationships go deeper than those we had with our friends back home. Truly God fills the life of His servants on the mission field with GOOD GIFTS.

Sometimes, however, missionary life appears to be like fruitless labour. We're even tempted to think of how much more useful I would be if I were home serving the Lord! Labouring on in faith and remaining faithful especially when the people are very unresponsive to the Gospel -- for years is a challenge to our faith. Not a few missionaries have laboured for many years before God has rewarded their hard labours and some have even died without seeing all that God was going to do through them.

So what keeps a missionary in those circumstances labouring on faithfully? It is the hope of eternal rewards they will receive from Christ's hands on the great last day. What these will be like none of us can possibly know now. However, missionaries and any one of us who labour in the Lord's vineyard can be assured that God rewards abundantly all those who serve in His kingdom faithfully. (cf. 1 Cor.3:8; 15:58)

This is a wonderful motivation for the missionary to press on and labour whether he/she receives any earthly rewards or thanks or not. God's rewards are sure. He's promised them. No matter what happens, if we have laboured faithfully in the calling of taking the Gospel to another people in obedience to His calling, then in the end we will receive our rewards.

And I am confident that this won't just be a momentary or passing experience but the eternal joy of seeing people in heaven -- people whose lives were changed forever, people whom we rescued from the perils of their sin snatched from the fire (cf. Jude 23) -- who will share eternity with us because we obeyed God's calling upon our lives and shared in the task of taking the Gospel to their nation, their people. I'd rather labour for such lasting rewards than for earthly prizes that we'll have to leave behind when we die, the things that man cherishes but that are so easily lost or taken from us.

Here then is a brief glimpse at the realities of missionary life -- exemplified in the life of greatest Apostle of all, Jesus, and also in Paul's life and service for God.

**In closing, God sets before us *THE CHALLENGE* of entering into His missionary work.**

It isn't God's will to send all of us to other peoples and countries as "missionaries". Nor would everyone of us be able to stand some of the pressures -- emotional, physical and spiritual. But

from every nation, from His church in every nation, God desires to send forth some to labour for Him among other peoples. To take His Good

News and to encourage and train His people to be true and bold in their witness for Him.

This means that He is calling people to go forth from Hungary, from Romania, from England, from Germany, from Holland and other nations also. Perhaps this could include YOU.

How can you know for sure? The starting point is making ourselves available to God for whatever He has for us to do for Him -- be it missionary work, to go to some faraway place, or to stay at home.

When Jesus sees and knows that we're available and ready to obey Him no matter what it may be, then He will make His plan clear -- though often we must wait patiently for some time before it is crystal clear to us. (Sometimes it will happen that He will give us that clear guidance in our hearts but at other times, His guidance will come through the counsel we receive from a brother or sister in Christ, from an elder or a pastor. God's Spirit normally speaks to us through His Word and through His people.)

But as we wait for God to open up the way and to give us clear guidance, so we can prepare our hearts. Keep in mind what missionary life is: a life of leaving behind, of identifying with people, of hard work in serving God, of pain, trial and suffering, and also of dying. But remember also that at the end of the road are the certain rewards that make all the hard work and trials worth it all.

Are you ready to make yourself available today? I want to give you an opportunity to make this definite. Remember I am not asking you to indicate that you will become a missionary. Only that you are ready and willing to do anything for God, to serve Him as a missionary if this is His plan for your life.

What is your response?

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April 22, 1995