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Mission Round Table

The OMF Journal for Reflective Practitioners

Stick with it!

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”
(1 Corinthians 15:58)

Contents

Mission Round Table Vol. 17 No. 1 January–April 2022

03	Editorial – <i>Walter McConnell</i>
04	Staying Well – <i>Janet Dallman</i>
12	A Response to “Staying Well” – <i>Beverlea Parkhill</i>
16	Training and Attrition – <i>David Harley</i>
26	Our Missionary Journey – <i>Asholi Akamu</i>
30	Not All Those Who Wander Are Lost – <i>Lydia</i>
33	The Modular Study Group: An Answer to One Part of the Problem of Missionary Retention – <i>Walter DeMoss and J. H.</i>

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Editorial

Walter McConnell

When I was doing pre-field deputation for OMF back in the late 1980s, I often attended meetings with other candidates and the then OMF USA Northwest Regional Director, Alex Smith. Alex frequently encouraged young missionaries and church members to be ready for action to preach the gospel. But since simply being ready isn't enough, he wisely advised that all missionaries should foster the attribute of sticktoitiveness. No doubt, he was aware of just how hard it is to live in a different culture and learn a new language to communicate spiritual truths that can impact one's eternal destiny. To make a lasting difference in this context, one needs sticktoitiveness. This long, composite word is often traced to late nineteenth-century America where Thomas Edison was reputed to have said, "The three great essentials to achieve anything worthwhile are, first, hard work; second, stick-to-itiveness; third, common sense." And indeed, when it comes to mission, one cannot downplay the need for hard work, perseverance—for that's what sticktoitiveness is—and common sense. But even more, we must align these things with an intimate knowledge of God, an ability to communicate his word accurately, and a desire to see others—some of whom may be antagonistic toward all things Christian—become active and growing members of God's family.

This issue of *Mission Round Table* is designed to help us stick to the job of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others. The articles here all emerge from the life stories of our writers who have stuck with the task and who provide us with tools so we can stick with it too. Based on her study of missionary retention in Japan, Janet Dallman identifies five key things that help workers stick with the work: (1) belief that God has called them to the work, (2) a flourishing spiritual life, (3) excellent self-awareness and self-care, (4) being part of a strong Christian community, and (5) excellent language and culture training that is ever improving. As you read her article,

consider what could be done in each of these areas so that you and others can stick it out. One person who has done just this is Beverlea Parkhill, the Director for Member Care and HR with OMF UK for the past ten years. Beverlea's reflections on Janet's principles of sticktoitiveness apply this attribute to the role of sending centers, particularly as it relates to member care. Others serving in similar positions will find her thoughts to be particularly stimulating.

A third paper that evaluates basic principles for missionary retention comes from David Harley, a former General Director of OMF. Drawing from history and his experience serving on several continents and teaching in a number of missionary training programs, David demonstrates the integral link between pre-field missionary training and long-term effectiveness. Rightly recognizing that there is no one way to prepare for missions, he shows how inadequate preparation can be disastrous for the people involved, their families, and the ministry they hope to join. Readers should notice that several of the areas he says need to be developed parallel concepts mentioned in Janet Dallman's paper, though some are more extensively developed.

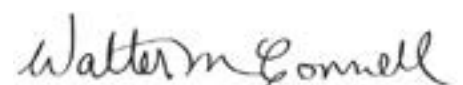
From basic principles and training that promote missionary retention, the next two articles highlight realities faced by missionaries on the ground. In the first, Asholi Akamu tells how he and his wife Puii came to serve the Akha people in Thailand and outlines some of the issues they, as Asian members of what is basically a Western mission agency, faced as they learned new languages and cultures (and learning the culture of their Western colleagues was in some ways the most challenging), raising support, raising and educating children, and coping with life after their children grew up and moved away. Asholi's very personal and realistic assessment of how long-term ministry takes one through many stages of life and changes as the church develops, gives readers a needed perspective on the road that lies ahead of them and reminds us all to keep our

eyes, not on the problems that dot the way, but on Jesus who is the way and who will travel with us until the very end.

A very different story is told by Lydia who came to Asia desiring to share Christ with a nomadic people but ended up feeling almost like a nomad herself as she constantly moved from here to there as doors she had prayed to be opened closed one after the other. Through all the uncertainty she has faced, she has stuck it out as God showed her that closed doors are part of the journey and that they help her get to know him and what he wants to do in and through her even while she is waiting.

In a final interview, Walter DeMoss and J H tell the story of an innovative approach to educating the children of missionaries that allows their parents to remain long-term in places where other educational opportunities are not available so they can serve peoples with little or no knowledge of Jesus Christ. In addition to recounting their experience of setting up and running Modular Study Groups, they provide information about situations in which they would be most useful and offer personal guidance to anyone who might like to know more about starting one.

When asked, church leaders from all over Asia repeatedly say they need missionaries who know language and culture, have developed good relationships with local churches, know how to do real gospel ministry, and can come alongside to help their ministry. In other words, they are looking for those who are well trained and have upward of twelve to fifteen years of active experience—missionaries who demonstrate sticktoitiveness. May this issue help us as we persevere in ministry and look for others who have what it takes to help the church with their needs today and tomorrow.



Editor, *Mission Round Table*

Staying Well

Janet Dallman



Janet Dallman is married to Peter and they have served as OMF missionaries in Japan since 1998. After studying Japanese language and culture, they worked in church planting and student ministry in Sapporo city, before welcoming and caring for new missionaries at OMF's Japanese Language and Culture Center. Janet currently serves as Member Care Advisor for OMF Japan and is author of *Out on a Limb*, a devotional book for missionaries.

This article is based on "Factors Affecting Attrition and Retention in Japan," Janet's thesis for the MA in Member Care from Redcliffe College and her book *Staying Well*. For more information, see *Staying Well*, available on Amazon. To receive a copy of her thesis, contact the author at dallmanjp@omfmail.com.

Introduction

As a missionary to Japan with OMF since 1998, I have seen lots of missionaries come—and go. Indeed, my husband and I have also struggled, simply to “stay” in Japan, as well as to “stay well” in Japan.

Maybe such struggles shouldn't be a surprise. We are warned, after all, to keep alert and be of sober mind, for we have an enemy who “prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8). The devil is not happy when missionaries share the saving news of Jesus. Is it any wonder it's a struggle to stay? No, we can expect it. Rather, the issue is how we can “stay well” in missionary service for as long as God calls us. So, what about all those missionaries who have left Japan? Undoubtedly, some left for sound reasons. But I've always wondered whether there were any who might have been prevented from leaving had better care or help been available or appropriately utilised.

Connected to the possible early departure of missionaries—attrition—is the issue of effectiveness. This concept is captured by Loss when he says,

The same factors which drive about one out of four to terminate before finishing ten years of service ... cause an additional two out of four to limp along at ... reduced efficiency.¹

The issue is not just preventing attrition, but also promoting thriving, effective service. The questions of how to prevent missionary attrition as well as how to enable

thriving, effective service are pertinent to all missionaries and mission organisations, in Japan and elsewhere.

In the context of mission to Japan, overall missionary numbers have declined from 2,800 in the mid-1980s to 1,700 in 2016—a drop of 39 percent in thirty years.² Moreover, the Japanese are the world's second largest unevangelised people group and evangelical Christians number less than one percent of the entire population.³ Therefore, fewer new missionaries and the possible early exit of trained and experienced missionaries are of major concern for the evangelisation of Japan, as well as for missionaries' well-being.

My story

My story began in the Democratic Republic of Congo where I was born to missionary parents. It continued as I served briefly with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Senegal and with Pioneers in the UK, before I joined OMF. For these reasons, I've always been concerned about missionaries' welfare. As a



result, as part of my master's studies in missionary member care at Redcliffe College, which I finished in July 2019, I researched not just why missionaries left Japan—attrition—but what helped them to stay put—retention!⁴

Considerable research has been conducted on missionary attrition and retention. Two of the important studies are ReMAP I—Reducing Missionary Attrition Project, which was carried out in 1995, and ReMAP II—Retaining Missionaries: Agency Practices, launched in 2002. Similar studies have examined missionary attrition of specific nationalities (e.g., the “Engage” study; *Good and Faithful* by Hudson Deane) and in specific agencies (e.g., *Toughing it Out* for OMF by Back and Johnson).⁵ Research concerning missionaries’ mental ill-health possibly contributing to attrition has also been conducted.⁶ However, to my knowledge, no research before my own focused on missionaries in Japan across a variety of agencies. As noted by Thompson:

ReMAP focuses on ... reasons for attrition, ReMAP II looks at ... organizational practices that lead to retention. Both are excellent ... add(ing) up to a more complete picture.... But something is still missing—the viewpoints of returned missionaries.⁷

Most of you will be reading this from outside the context of Japan. How does the research presented here apply to missionaries serving in other countries? Taylor says,

we urgently need to hear the ... voice of those who returned home early ... from mission service.... But we also want to study ... retention of missionaries. What makes them stick?⁸

How can missionaries themselves and their agencies enable thriving, long-term service—benefitting the missionaries themselves and God’s kingdom?

My research

To answer this question, I examined the Japanese context and carried out



a desk-based literature review in the areas of attrition and retention. I then conducted an online survey, which collected 218 responses, and carried out fifteen semi-structured interviews. The survey and interviews were conducted amongst missionaries to Japan—both current and former missionaries—from a range of ages, nationalities, and mission agencies, with differing lengths of service.

My discoveries

Before I consider in greater depth five key topics for missionary retention both in Japan and worldwide, allow me to highlight a few discoveries, both positive and negative, thrown up by my research amongst missionaries to Japan.

- Firstly, I was amazed to discover how long some missionaries served in Japan! Eleven percent of those surveyed had served between 31 and 35 years! Overall, however, the survey respondents’ average length of service is/was 16.5 years. This contrasts with the ReMAP II study where length of service ranged from 6.3 to 10 years amongst Newer Sending Countries (Africa, Asian and Latin America),⁹ to 7.9 to 15.5 years amongst Older Sending Countries (Europe and North America).¹⁰ These figures are encouraging in respect of missionaries’ longevity and potential effectiveness in Japan.

- On the other side of the coin, 40 percent of those surveyed left Japan within a decade, and the majority of those had served between 6 and 10 years, arguably just as they were starting to gain experience and become most effective.¹¹
- In regard to pre-field training that enabled them to stay in Japan, 26 percent of the survey respondents ranked seminary/Bible training top (“5” on a scale of 1–5 with “5” being the highest) and 58 percent ranked it “4” or “5”. These high rankings concur with the findings of ReMAP I, which confirmed that higher minimal training requirements correlate with higher retention.¹²
- In regard to on-field training factors enabling them to stay in Japan, 29 percent of the respondents ranked initial language learning uppermost at “5”, while 73 percent ranked it “4” or “5”. Ongoing language learning was placed at “5” by 25 percent of the respondents, and “4” or “5” by 70 percent. These figures affirm ReMAP II’s findings that initial and ongoing language and culture study are highly correlated with retention.¹³ We will consider the topic of language and culture learning in greater detail later.
- One surprising finding was how many missionaries left Japan to support adult children in their passport countries. Writing as someone who is not a parent, I had expected parents would have to leave for the sake of younger children’s education, but not to help adult children settle in university, life, and work. This has implications for missionary families as they strive to

How can missionaries themselves and their agencies enable thriving, long-term service—benefitting the missionaries themselves and God’s kingdom?



help their children flourish in two or more worlds. It also means that agencies need to proactively and creatively engage families about this issue before arrival, during missionary service, and on home assignment.

- Also unexpected was that survey respondents ranked “ongoing culture learning” more highly than “initial culture learning” in assisting them to stay in Japan. I wonder if the reason for that is the fact that when many missionaries first come to Japan, they are overwhelmed by language learning, so culture learning takes a back seat. But the longer missionaries remain in Japan, the more they realise they don’t just need language, but culture too. This will be considered further below.
- Unhappily, “Ministry Mismatch” was ranked fifth overall amongst factors that influenced missionaries’ decisions to leave Japan. Moreover, survey respondents who served between 0 and 10 years ranked it top, indicating the need for honesty in mobilisation and recruitment by mission agencies, as well as candidates’ thoughtful agency selection. Therefore, agencies need to consider their mobilisation strategies and priorities very wisely,
- being careful not simply to recruit anyone who’s interested, without considering the reality “on the ground.” It also highlights the need for healthy expectations and ongoing discussions in regard to ministry focus and location for missionaries already on the field.
- In regard to their agency’s on-field support that enabled them to stay in Japan, the top-ranked factor was pastoral support by missionary colleagues. This is corroborated by the findings of previous research into the value of supportive communities¹⁴ and was also borne out in the interviews in my study. We will consider this in more detail later.
- The high ranking of agencies’ mission, vision, and values in regard to agencies’ on-field support factors that enabled missionaries to stay in Japan surprised me, although the importance of an agency’s doctrinal statement was mentioned in the results of ReMAP I.¹⁵ Therefore, this requires agencies to be transparent during recruitment and beyond. Agency mismatch leads to dissent and hurt on both sides, and can lead to early, even acrimonious, departure if unresolved.

Agencies must carefully assess candidates’ spiritual vitality and resiliency, accepting only those candidates who demonstrate spiritual growth and maturity along with a willingness to develop further.

- Finally, I think the biggest surprise of all was that so many respondents mentioned the importance of “self-awareness”—that missionaries need to know themselves well, what causes them stress, how they relax, and so on. We will address this later.

Results and recommendations

I will highlight five of the most significant results of my research and their implications for mission agencies and missionaries in Japan and elsewhere.

1. God’s call

Seventy-three percent of the survey respondents, supported by many interviewees, highlighted the supreme importance of God’s call, both to serve in Japan and to leave.

Although opinions differ regarding the concept of God’s call to mission—with some emphasising the missionary-nature of every Christian’s life and others viewing missionary life as a form of vocation¹⁶—the sense of my question and, I believe, most survey participants’ responses largely focused on the need to be certain of God’s specific call (in this case, to Japan), because of the attendant challenges of overseas mission.

For example, one interviewee said: “Make sure you know deep in your core that God has called you to Japan, and you’re not going to keep wobbling ... when it gets hard.” Another commented: “Having a clear purpose and knowledge of God’s leading is essential.” Yet

another said that “without the assurance of God’s call, I probably would have left in the first year.” One ninety-year-old respondent said God’s call remained important and vibrant, having now served in Japan for sixty-six years. Meanwhile, one former missionary said:

We never intended to leave ... but obviously God ... had other plans. We ... never regretted our decision to live and work in Japan, but neither do we regret following God’s call to [another ministry].

These comments correspond to conclusions by Fullerton, Brown, and Brierley and endorse my own experience.¹⁷ When things are tough, assurance of and obedience to God’s call is paramount.

These results have weighty implications for missionaries and agencies worldwide. For example, prospective missionaries should be encouraged to carefully examine and test God’s call, while acknowledging differing theological views on calling. Equally, agencies should require a clear account of an individual’s leading to missionary work as well as an account of an individual’s leading to missionary work in a specific context—location, people, and/or agency. Furthermore, current missionaries should be encouraged to regularly reflect on God’s call, perhaps enabled through organisational reviews/interviews, and/or personal retreats and contemplation.

Brown says: “Ensuring a firm call at the beginning seems to contribute to resiliency...”¹⁸ Therefore, an assurance of God’s call, both initially and subsequently, which holds firm during dark times, is needed if missionaries are to remain or if God calls them to leave.

2. Spiritual life

Survey respondents ranked a missionary’s devotional or spiritual life second in factors that helped them remain in Japan. One survey respondent said:

many times I doubt[ed] my call and/or usefulness—at those times especially my personal relationship with Jesus was/is of utmost importance.

Another interviewee commented that “Strategy’s good ... but ... the number one strategy is you get your people on fire.”

These results and comments correspond with the findings of ReMAP II, which identified missionaries’ spiritual life among the top three missionary retention factors.¹⁹ Prins and Willemse, and Selvey also highlight spiritual formation, spiritual character, and healthy spirituality as retention-boosting factors for missionaries.²⁰

In the light of this, then, how can both missionaries and mission agencies (1) enable continuing growth in spiritual maturity, (2) aim to persistently cultivate personal and corporate devotional practices, and (3) develop a proper understanding of spiritual warfare?

Firstly, agencies must carefully assess candidates’ spiritual vitality and resiliency and accept only those candidates who demonstrate spiritual growth and maturity along with a willingness to develop further. It may also be pertinent to consider the role of Bible training/seminary in this process. Is such training “required”—and if so, how much and to what level?—or simply “desired”? Spiritually immature new missionaries facing transition, and often with poor language ability, will struggle to feed themselves spiritually and to maintain spiritual vitality, especially in a harsh spiritual climate. Commenting on new missionaries, Bosch says:

Some missionaries are going to the field too early, without ... the right foundation in Christ. ... Who you are at home is who you will be on the field, but with added stress ... that widen(s) existing cracks.²¹

Secondly, mission agencies need to consider how to encourage and enable ongoing spiritual vitality for all missionaries. For example, spiritual development could be facilitated through training in spiritual formation and self-awareness, regular fellowship, agencies’ retreats/conferences, regular reviews and policies regarding sabbaticals, and/or leave for spiritual refreshment.

Missionaries, for their part, must take every opportunity to spend time with Christ and his people, intentionally cultivating their personal and corporate spiritual life through things like Bible studies, prayer triplets, prayer meetings, conferences, and retreats.

Finally, missionaries and agencies need to be aware of the reality of spiritual warfare, its expressions, and strategies for handling it. One interviewee cautions that we must “always be aware that it is a battle field and ... you might get ... taken out if you’re not careful.”

3. Self-awareness and self-care

In their advice to prospective/new missionaries, interviewees ranked self-awareness third.

One former missionary lamented: “I wish we’d ... had a deeper insight to ourselves.” Another said that “self-awareness is very important; knowing yourself in relation to ... God ... and your identity in Jesus.” Yet another commented that you need to

know what works for you before you come ... you don’t become a different



person when you come to the field ... for ministry practice ... as well as ... how we relate to God ... know yourself, know what you need.

Closely linked to healthy levels of self-awareness is self-care.

In regard to overall survey results concerning factors that influenced missionaries to leave Japan, participants ranked poor physical health fourth, stress sixth, overwork ninth, and poor mental health twelfth. However, in regard to factors that helped them stay in Japan, survey respondents rated holidays as the twelfth most important retention factor. Furthermore, twelve interviewees mentioned a healthy lifestyle more than fifty times; and in their advice to new missionaries, seven interviewees recommended a healthy lifestyle more than thirty times.

Both Bosch and Eenigenburg stress the importance of self-care for missionary retention and effective, thriving service. If self-awareness and, linked to that, self-care are ranked so highly, how can missionaries grow in these areas?²²

Firstly, greater self-awareness can be developed through a varied life and ministry experience before beginning missionary service. Interestingly, this was also mentioned by many survey respondents as part of the pre-field training that enabled them to stay in Japan. This highlights the value of life and work experience in the home country, as well as home church teaching and discipling, and opportunities to serve. This may mean that more attention should be given to these areas during candidacy, and that coming to missionary service somewhat later (but not too late!) might be advantageous.

Secondly, missionaries and agencies should consider how to develop missionaries' character and self-awareness, empowering them to more



adequately live a healthy lifestyle, which consists of physical, mental, emotional, and vocational health, and includes hobbies and holidays. Ideally, such education will have been taught in churches, but should also be provided during Bible/missionary training. However, opportunities for reflection and learning should be ongoing, with intentional self-reflection, perhaps through personal retreats, reviews and so forth, along with tools, such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the DISC Personality Test, etc.²³ While recognising that not all such tools are beneficial in all situations with every person, some means of understanding and evaluating one's strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of others *and* how to get along together in life and ministry, is surely vital for flourishing missionary service.

Thirdly, mission agency policies, procedures, and practices should be informed and developed according to the needs of self-awareness and self-care, ensuring also that they are put into practice. Discussing Sabbath-taking, one interviewee said: "I think ... leaders could have modelled it better." Agencies urgently need to address missionary "busyness," with leaders setting the pace by demonstrating self-care. Another respondent commented on the inability

of missionaries to take a real break due to a lack of vacation cover. This, while understandable, is unhelpful in sustaining long-term ministry. Agencies have a duty to care by providing adequate leave for missionaries, including holidays, sabbaticals, and family leave.

However, teaching by churches, seminaries, and agencies, along with life-giving mission policies and procedures can only facilitate what is needed. *Missionaries themselves must prioritise and practice self-awareness and self-care.* A healthy lifestyle—self-care—alone, won't solve all the problems, but it will assist missionaries to cope with high levels of stress, to operate in cultures where language and cultural demands are difficult, to manage time and ministry demands, and so forth.

4. Christian community

Interviewees ranked Christian community second in their advice to new/prospective missionaries and in the area of self-care, with one advising:

try and develop a friendship with at least one other missionary ... or someone that you can relate to ... take the time ... to develop that relationship ... it is a personal discipline.

It has always been easy to neglect local relationships, due to fear and lack of language ability and cultural understanding, but now it is perhaps even easier not to make time to really get involved with people locally. The ease of communication and travel (in non-pandemic times) also means that missionaries' "rootedness" needs to be given careful thought—not travelling or communicating too easily or quickly.

Meanwhile, survey respondents ranked “missionary community” seventh in factors that helped them stay in Japan.

Luthar encapsulates the importance of community, saying, “Resilience rests, fundamentally, on relationships.”²⁴ Good relationships with colleagues was placed in the hierarchy of retention factors in ReMAP I and Brown identifies “sturdy relationships” between missionaries as vital.²⁵ Wilson and Hoffman comment simply: “God created us for ... community,” while Nelson correlates good community life with missionary retention.²⁶

Firstly, therefore, agencies need to consider how to assist missionaries in establishing and maintaining good relationships and helpful

What does it mean to live “in” a country and not “on” it?

actual), regular visits to and from other missionaries, and, ideally, by placing missionaries in teams.²⁷ Agencies could establish a “caring community” through “mission family” time and perhaps through basic training in member care for everyone. However, precisely because friendships develop organically, self-care demands that missionaries be proactive in reaching out to colleagues—those who value and intentionally build community are more likely to remain. Building deep relationships takes time; it may feel “risky” and may cost money. However, unless community is prioritised, missionary retention is threatened.

the home country using electronic means. Perhaps this trend has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, when worldwide communication moved online. It has always been easy to neglect local relationships, due to fear and lack of language ability and cultural understanding, but now it is perhaps even easier not to make time to really get involved with people locally. This is something to watch out for. The ease of communication and travel (in non-pandemic times) also means that missionaries’ “rootedness” needs to be given careful thought—not travelling or communicating too easily or quickly. What does it mean to live “in” a country and not “on” it?



communication practices (e.g., prayer letters, Zoom, WhatsApp, visits, etc.) with their global community, including financial supporters, churches, family, friends, etc. This process should begin before arrival and be reviewed regularly. Simultaneously, missionaries’ self-care must include regular and appropriately open communication with supporters, family, and friends that is neither too frequent nor non-existent.

Secondly, although supportive friendships develop organically, mission agencies should reflect on how to facilitate and encourage opportunities for missionaries to get to know—and, therefore, support—one another. Such “sturdy relationships” can be nurtured through regular fellowship (virtual and

Thirdly, interviewees, and survey respondents to some extent, highlighted the need to purposefully establish satisfying local Christian community (as well as non-Christian friends) as much as possible. One interviewee commented that

the longer I’ve been in Japan, more of the communal elements of my faith have been able to shift to a Japanese context. I still appreciate the English context ... but I’m able to, both through Japanese sermons and interactions with Japanese Christians, be encouraged.

This point is perhaps especially important to emphasise, because it is now so easy to communicate with friends in

5. Language and culture learning

Survey respondents ranked an initial period of language learning third in factors that helped them to stay in Japan, with ongoing language and culture study also ranked among the top ten. Conversely, struggles with the Japanese language featured in the top ten reasons for missionaries to leave Japan. Interviewees, too, commented on the challenge of learning Japanese language and culture.

ReMAP I (Reducing Missionary Attrition Project) ranked language and cultural adaptation fourth in ways to reduce attrition.²⁸ Selvey notes: “effective cross-cultural ministry ... requires ... understanding ... the customs, thinking and beliefs of the host culture.”²⁹

Personalities, family background, and culture are created and given by God, but appropriate enculturation, not simply language learning, is needed if we are to reach people’s hearts.³⁰

Therefore, perhaps particularly relevant in a country like Japan that has a highly complex language and culture, these results suggest that an initial, exclusive period of language study is helpful, and also highlight the importance of ongoing language and culture study.

Mission agencies, therefore, need to ensure deliberate, ongoing language and culture study opportunities for their missionaries, while missionaries need to be intentional and enduring in their learning. Furthermore, in regard

to previous comments on self-care, missionaries need to be enthusiastically deliberate in their study of their host culture, exploring new places and trying new experiences. Agencies, meanwhile, may want to consider establishing “culture workshops”, particularly for new missionaries. These may be developed independently or in collaboration with other agencies, and could be accessed locally or remotely.

Final words and “over to you”

To conclude then, my research shows that the following major topics (amongst many others) are vital for retention for missionaries to Japan:

- the centrality of God’s call
- a flourishing spiritual life
- high levels of self-awareness and self-care
- Christian community (missionary, local, and global)
- excellent and ongoing language and culture training

But of course, these issues don’t just apply to missionaries to Japan! Any missionary, anywhere in the world, would benefit from ensuring these factors are adequately met. And any mission agency, anywhere in the world, should surely strive to see these areas met on behalf of their missionaries and for the sake of God’s kingdom advancement.

How could you apply this research to yourself, your missionaries, and your agency? I close with some questions for your consideration:

- How do you evaluate God’s call on your life, and how could you help other missionaries assess and re-assess their call?
- How could you and your agency encourage spiritual growth amongst yourselves? Allow yourself to dream!
- How do you care for yourself, and how could/does your organisation enable you and others in this?
- How are you participating in Christian community, and what would you like to see amongst your missionary community?
- How could you and others in your agency learn about, engage with, and enjoy the language and culture of your host nation?

In conclusion, let me repeat the wise words that “Missionary retention among

cross-cultural workers is a marathon not a sprint.”³¹ All missionaries, and the agencies with whom they work, need to be intentional about building retention-boosting practices into their lives, ministries, and organisations. **MRT**

¹ Myron Loss, *Culture Shock: Dealing with Stress in Cross-Cultural Living* (Middleburg, PA: M. Loss, 1983), 3, quoted in David L. Shepherd, “Promoting Missionary Mutual Care Through Spiritual Community” (DMin thesis, George Fox University, 2014), <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1085&context=dmin> (accessed 24 February 2022), 33–34.

² John Mehn, *Multiplying Churches in Japanese Soil* (Pasadena: William Carey, 2017), 4.

³ Joshua Project, “Unreached: 100 Largest,” <https://joshuaproject.net/unreached/?limit=100&=Population&o=asc> (accessed 24 February 2022).

⁴ Janet Dallman, “Factors Affecting Attrition and Retention in Japan” (MA thesis, Redcliffe College, 2019).

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⁶ Mark A. Strand et al., “Mental Health of Cross-Cultural Healthcare Missionaries,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 43, no. 4 (December 2015): 283–93.

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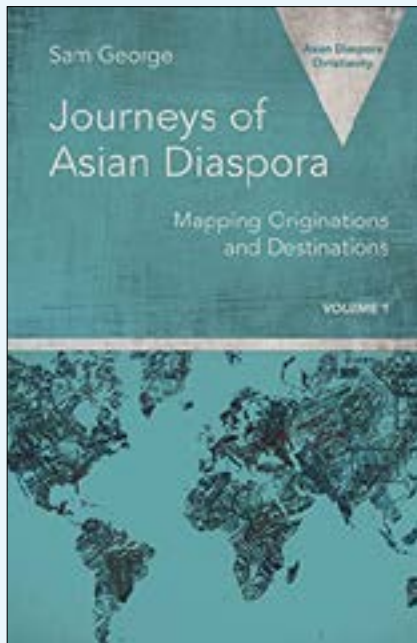
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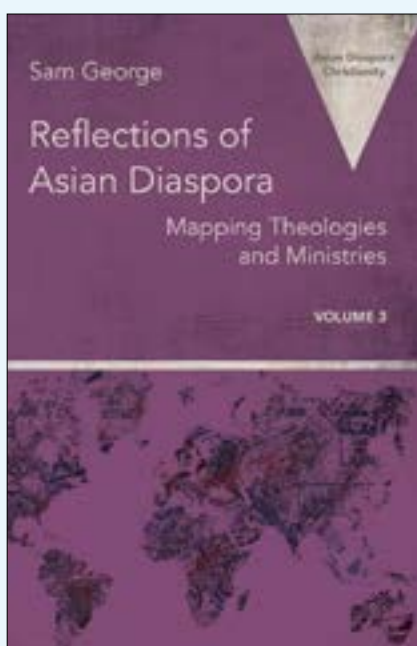
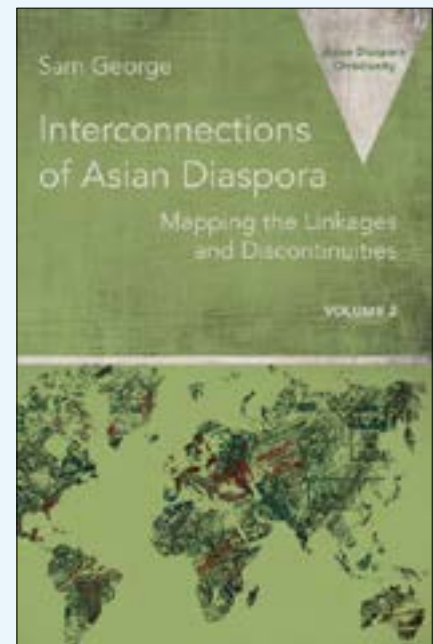
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Written by leading Asian scholars from divergent backgrounds, the twelve essays in this volume survey connections of Asian diaspora Christians from various parts of the world. They explicate the linkages between the places of ancestry and the current habitations of Asian emigrants and their descendants. It explores a wide range of topics, including religious faith in diaspora, family life in transnational contexts, women and migration, hyphenated identity, and leadership styles of Asian diasporas.



Reflections of Asian Diaspora: Mapping Theologies and Ministries vol. 3

Minneapolis, Fortress Press – forthcoming. ISBN 9781506487489

This volume brings together scholars of Asian background and a few others situated in diverse locations to draw insights on Christian ministry from a diasporic perspective. It has a particular focus on the Asian diasporic experience in areas of theology and ministry, and addresses practical issues, such as English-language worship, contextual leadership, and missionary training.

A Response to “Staying Well”

Beverlea Parkhill



Beverlea Parkhill joined OMF in the UK in 1998 and moved to East Asia as a member in 2005 to serve at Singapore-IHQ and then as part of a services team based in Chiang Mai. Since 2012, she has served as the Director for Member Care and HR in OMF UK. In 2018, she completed a master's degree in Member Care at Redcliffe College in the UK.

Janet Dallman's paper on “Staying Well” has highlighted five key areas that have an impact on missionary attrition and retention. As someone who has worked in personnel and member care roles within OMF for almost twenty-five years in field, home, and international contexts, I have seen individuals, couples, and families leave their ministry contexts for a variety of reasons—some for good reasons, but also some for preventable ones. In my current role as Director for Member Care and HR in OMF UK, I have seen members leave the field prematurely and sometimes negatively, often after only one or two terms.

In the ten years I have been in my current role, I have seen a reduction in the numbers of members sent from the UK. Ten years is not a long time in terms of establishing trends and so this is just a snapshot of my experience in this role. I understand that the average length of service in OMF is about ten years (or two terms). From some rough calculations made last year, I estimate that the average length of service in OMF UK has risen from ten years in 2010 to fourteen years in 2020, which, if accurate—maths isn't necessarily a strength of mine!—is encouraging. But we still have a long way to go to retain members for the long haul. REMAP II, in 2006, highlighted twenty years as the average length of service for long-term missionaries who had left between 2001 and 2002 from a high-retention agency and ten years for low-retention agencies, so OMF UK's figures fit broadly with this wider study.¹

However, in gathering data from around the world while compiling *Operation World*, Patrick Johnstone reports that the period between eight and seventeen years on the field, on average, seems to be when mission workers are probably at their most fruitful.² This statistic is from 2011, and so it would be interesting to see how it compares to 2022 data, if only the figures were available. If the 2011

statistics are still valid, how do we keep our workers on the field for the long-haul, so that they can be fruitful and effective?

Two questions

Before commenting on the issues highlighted by Dallman, I would like to ask two questions that are crucial for this conversation. (1) Is retention just the opposite of attrition? (2) Are we putting our efforts into retaining people for the right reasons?

In response to the first question, it can be seen that

retention is more than the opposite of attrition. Retention takes into consideration who the people are in the agency, how long they have been with the agency, at what point in a person's career a person leaves, and the reasons for that leaving.³

Both attrition and retention rates are important to give an overview of how an organisation is doing in terms of caring for its people. However, it is not feasible to look only at the reasons for attrition in order to understand how to increase retention in an organisation. For example, when people leave the organisation, they will give their stated reasons for leaving. However, there may be many unspoken reasons that the organisation may not be aware of. It may focus their attention on the wrong things. Blöcher noted the following reasons why people leave: stated reasons (such as those given in an exit interview), personal reasons (told to close friends or family), secret reasons (not shared but believed deep in their heart), reasons identified by the team or field leader, recorded reasons (added to the personnel file), believed reasons accepted by the director of the sending agency, socially accepted reasons (published in the mission journal), further reasons identified by the missionary's professional counsellor, and, true reasons (a combination of the above or something completely different).⁴



In terms of whether we are keeping the right people for the right reasons, we should celebrate when members return home to retire after thirty or forty years on the field. Retirement is a natural end to someone's active ministry on the field. However, as Dallman notes in her article, we need to promote effective service rather than seeing members limping along to the end.⁵

We should be frequently reviewing the effectiveness of our members, providing specific feedback on how they are doing and assessing the level of input that needs to be poured into the lives of members to keep them going on the field, and evaluating at what point the burden outweighs their ministry effectiveness. Several years ago, I was involved in conversations, alongside a field leader, with a family that was struggling on the field. A lot of the issues only came to light when the family came back to the UK on home assignment. The issue of the level of input and support needed from the whole field team as well as from leadership was raised as a concern. This led to conversations with the family about levels of resilience, their lack of a vibrant spiritual life, and the challenges of cross-cultural life and ministry. In the end, neither homeside clearance nor a field welcome were given to the family and they subsequently left the organisation. That was a tough situation to work through—for them and for us! Asking the hard questions isn't always well-received, but it is a necessary process to ensure that we do the right thing for our members as well as for their ministry contexts.

In what follows, I will return to Dallman's five key areas to consider

how a sending centre could engage with these areas to encourage retention.

1. God's call

The "Purpose and Principles" of OMF reads "Applicants for membership are required to satisfy the Directors and Councils/Boards concerned as to their soundness in the faith, suitability for service and call to service with the Fellowship." Part of the candidate process is to assess God's call on individual lives. A robust candidate process is necessary to test and confirm God's call.

Linked to this, the UK candidate team ensures that new members have job descriptions in place before they go to the field. This is to help make sure they understand their role, at least when they initially go to the field, so that they will have realistic expectations of what they are going into. This feeds into the self-care area mentioned below. However, it is also helpful for sending churches to know what their role is expected to be as they seek to endorse the candidate and their gifting.

Assessing God's call on a candidate's life is only one element of pre-field selection and training, yet one that is key to retention. Theological and missiology training, physical health reviews, organisational orientation, and church engagement are all important elements that need to be considered in pre-field selection and training.

2. Spiritual life

Like Dallman, I completed the MA in Member Care at Redcliffe College. My

dissertation on "Self-Care for Single Missionaries" highlighted the great need one has to maintain a healthy spiritual life while serving overseas (although it is important for any believer wherever they are).⁶ One individual commented that her "spiritual life is the only thing that keeps [her] going on the field."⁷ Tony Horsfall, a former OMF member who has been involved in cross-cultural mission and pastoral care for most of his life, comments:

With this as my background, I am more convinced than ever of this: that the spiritual life is the key to longevity in mission! A relationship with God is the greatest resource ... for coping with the challenges of cross-cultural living; for being effective in our particular ministry and for making our time in the "adopted" country or community a satisfying and fulfilling one.⁸

As a sending centre, we can encourage our members to take time out to be refreshed spiritually while on home assignment. This can be through re-engaging with their sending church(es) or by taking time out for a retreat. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the increased use of online technology has meant that mission workers can listen to sermons from their sending churches. This has been a blessing to many, especially to those who are not able to regularly attend church services in their ministry context.⁹ We are blessed here in the UK to have retreat centres that cater specifically for mission workers. One such centre that I am personally familiar with is Penhurst Retreat Centre, which offers retreats such as "Refilling Whilst We Pour Out" or "Grace Space for Mission Partners."¹⁰

Their “Preparing for Retirement” retreat has received much praise from the OMF members who have attended it.

3. Self-awareness and self-care

Self-care refers to the way mission workers can care for themselves proactively and wisely by having a balanced lifestyle throughout the ups and downs of their missionary life. This includes caring for our spiritual life, physical health, and emotional health. Self-care needs to be both proactive and preventative in nature so that mission workers can thrive in their mission contexts. Various self-care questionnaires are available online that are useful for mission workers to work through.¹¹

After having written my dissertation on self-care, I am convinced that we can do so much more to better care for ourselves, and that part of this is through being self-aware. The following quote from Ohanian is one which I feel describes self-care well:

Self-care is neither selfish nor egotistical, but a wise, mature, preventative and self-respecting practice for anyone who desires to remain in their role of care and service. Self-care ensures that one will thrive and flourish as opposed to merely survive and cope. Self-care is the unseen root system, deep, nourished, expanding, of a strong, resilient, blossoming tree.¹²

Self-care is important for retention. As Brenda Bosch highlights:

Some of us do not last long, simply because in our race in life we permanently sprint, instead of keeping in mind that we are in a long-distance marathon, which means that we need to take small breaks to refresh ourselves along the way.¹³

She goes on to state that agencies often see workers leave the field due to a lack of self-care “because they simply could not keep up with the pace with which they set out.”¹⁴

As a sending centre, we can encourage self-care, but cannot do it for members. One aspect of self-care that we, as the UK centre, have commended is that of setting up confidential personal debriefs for mission workers on home assignment. The REMAP II research observed that debriefing correlated highly with retention.¹⁵

A debrief is an opportunity for the member to reflect on their personal experiences without any feedback to the organisation. It allows the mission workers to feel listened to and valued. It can be helpful, especially at times of transition and crisis. Koteskey states that it gives people time to express thoughts and feelings, normalise those thoughts and feelings, and help to put those experiences in context.¹⁶ It is also a time to celebrate the positives of the term. Many of our members have fed back to us that they greatly valued these personal debriefs, especially at a time of transition.

Another way that we can encourage members, especially during the candidate process, is to help them set healthy expectations. These include expectations of themselves, their ministry, and others (whether team leaders, sending churches, agency, team members, or national friends). One respondent in my research commented that they felt the organisation should “encourage people to not have unreasonable expectations and they need to understand what missionary life is really about.”¹⁷

These expectations can be addressed throughout the recruitment process, when attending Candidates Course, during the Orientation Course, and during field orientation. It is a message that needs to be reinforced throughout the candidate and orientation process as this is a time when candidates and new workers can often feel overloaded with information and they may need help in setting priorities. I meet with each of our UK candidates when they attend the European Candidates Course. One of the things I ask them about is their expectations for when they are on the field. Most, if not all, say that they don’t have any expectations. Koteskey argues that this is impossible.¹⁸ Everyone has expectations; many of which can be unrealistic. He

states that “Such expectations are most obvious and most common among the idealistic first-term missionaries who have such high hopes and great visions of how God will use them.”¹⁹

If expectations are not met (whether we are aware of them or not), disappointment, frustration, and stress can follow. I suggest to our new workers that they take time to think through their expectations and to discuss them with relevant groups of people—their church leaders, Bible college lecturers, other mission workers, and field leaders in advance of going. This will help them arrive on the field with realistic expectations. Part of my session with new workers is to talk through how they will connect with the UK centre throughout their first term and home assignment to help set realistic expectations. Of course, managing expectations is an ongoing process throughout the missionary life cycle and can be addressed through field conferences, home assignment workshops, regular centre communications, and so on.

4. Christian community

As Dallman has highlighted, agencies can encourage and assist workers to establish practices such as setting good patterns of communication through regular prayer letters and establishing accountability partners. The OMF UK Centre requires its members to send a minimum of ten prayer letters per year. It is often the case that the members who don’t send regular prayer letters are the ones who are struggling the most (and are sometimes the lowest supported financially). We try to follow up on those who don’t write regularly to their prayer partners.

Accountability is having someone trustworthy to whom we can appropriately disclose struggles, through whom we





can be encouraged, supported, and challenged. From my research, one respondent to the questionnaire felt that

people who live on their own have no-one to point out they are overworking, not eating properly, not getting enough sleep. We can get away with it more easily. We are responsible for ourselves but being accountable to one another about the way we care for ourselves is important.²⁰

Another respondent said that her work schedule changes from week to week and month to month. This has an impact on her days off and several weeks can pass without having a proper day off. “Since I work and live alone, and regularly work from home, there is also no-one who is really prodding me to stop and take time off.”²¹

Several OMF sending centres already recommend members to put together a “home ministry team” made up of key supporters who serve the missionary by providing pastoral care, and prayer, practical, and emotional support. One book that is recommended by the UK centre is *PACT to Go!*, which is a guide to creating a Personal Accountability and Care Team.²² This is a practical and relevant book.

5. Language and culture learning

In reading Dallman’s fifth area, my first reaction was to say that this didn’t apply to sending centres as it was more of a field issue. However, there are times when it is appropriate for the sending centre to be aware of mission workers who are struggling with language and culture

learning to facilitate communication with the sending church or to encourage praying more specifically for them.

It is also helpful for sending centres to be aware of field policies on language and culture learning so as to help set expectations for when mission workers could go on home assignment. In some receiving centres, there is an expectation of completing a specific level in language learning before proceeding to two years of ministry. Depending on how long it takes to complete the language learning, the worker’s first term may be longer than four years. This has an impact on home assignment timing and also on the energy levels of mission workers for home assignment.

Conclusion

In responding to the five areas discussed in Dallman’s article about retaining members, I have found it helpful to reflect on the role of sending centres. This needs to be done in partnership with the individual mission partners, sending churches, and the receiving centres. It highlights the need for good communication among all parties. There are many other issues relating to retention, such as children’s education or home assignments, that haven’t been touched on here but should be considered in a wider review of retention and so I look forward to seeing more discussion on this topic in the future. **MRT**

¹ Detlef Blöcher, “US Report of Findings on Missionary Retention: December 2003,” unpublished paper, 5, http://www.worldevangelicals.org/resources/rfiles/res3_95_link_1292358708.pdf (accessed 23 March 2022).

² Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends and Possibilities* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011), 227.

³ Louis Carter, David Giber, and Marshall Goldsmith, eds., *Best Practices in Organization Development and Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, 2001), 302.

⁴ Detlef Blöcher, “ReMAP 1: What It Said, What It Did, and What It Achieved,” in *Worth Keeping: Global Perspectives on Good Practices in Missionary Retention*, ed. Rob Hay et al. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 2006), 10.

⁵ Myron Loss, *Culture Shock: Dealing with Stress in Cross-cultural Living* (Middleburg, PA: M. Loss, 1983), quoted in David L. Shepherd, “Promoting Missionary Mutual Care Through Spiritual Community” (DMin thesis, George Fox University, 2014), 33–34, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1085&context=dmin> (accessed 31 March 2022).

⁶ Beverlea Parkhill, “Self-Care for Single Mission Workers within OMF International (UK): The Challenges and Opportunities” (MA thesis, Redcliffe College, 2018).

⁷ Parkhill, “Self-Care for Single Mission Workers,” 65.

⁸ Tony Horsfall, *Spirituality for the Long-Haul: Maintaining Yourself in Christian Mission*, Mission Life and Practice Series 6 (Milton Keynes: Kitab-Interserve Resources, 2014), 42.

⁹ While a blessing to some, it may be an unwelcome burden to others whose sending churches put unrealistic expectations on their mission workers to join meetings at impractical times. There also needs to be a balance between maintaining a connection to home and engaging fully with the host culture.

¹⁰ Penhurst Retreat Centre, www.penhurst.org.uk (accessed 31 March 2022).

¹¹ See Sarita Hartz, “A Self-Care Plan for Global Workers: Learn to Prevent Burnout,” which can be downloaded from <http://www.saritahartz.com> or https://www.mtwcare.org/uploads/8/9/8/6/89863841/self_care_assessment_draft_only_the_assessment_draft_2019_12_04.pdf (accessed 23 March 2022).

¹² Nairy Ohanian, “Self-Care,” unpublished paper, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0BxkNxNdI_KSdZE1EOHRhdVhia0k (accessed 23 March 2022).

¹³ Brenda Bosch, *Thriving in Difficult Places: Member Care for Yourself and Others*, Vol. 2 (n.p.: Brenda Bosch, 2014), 202.

¹⁴ Bosch, *Thriving in Difficult Places*, 204.

¹⁵ Hay et al., *Worth Keeping*, 382.

¹⁶ Ronald L. Koteskey, *What Missionaries Ought to Know ...: A Handbook for Life and Service*, Revised (Wilmore, KY: Ronald L. Koteskey, 2017), 413. This can be downloaded in several e-forms from <https://www.missionarycare.com/what-missionaries-ought-to-know.html> (accessed 23 March 2022).

¹⁷ Parkhill, “Self-Care for Single Mission Workers,” 73.

¹⁸ Koteskey, *What Missionaries Ought to Know*, 37.

¹⁹ Koteskey, *What Missionaries Ought to Know*, 37.

²⁰ Parkhill, “Self-Care for Single Mission Workers,” 68.

²¹ Parkhill, “Self-Care for Single Mission Workers,” 68.

²² Rod and Ruthie Gilbert, *PACT to Go!: A Cross-cultural Worker’s Guide to Creating a Personal Accountability and Care Team*, Revised (Niceville, FL: Elemental, 2020).

Training and Attrition

David Harley



Having lived in Africa, Asia and Europe, David and his wife, Rosemary, have expertise and experience in a variety of areas within Christian work, including that of Christian witness to people of other faiths. David has served as Principal at All Nations Christian College (1985 to 1993) and as General Director of OMF International (2001 to 2006). He studied at Cambridge University and holds doctorates in missiology from Columbia University in the USA and the University of Utrecht in Holland. He is the author of several books, including *Preparing to Serve* and *Missionary Training*. Since his retirement, David has continued to minister through speaking and preaching around the world.

A dedicated Christian from Kerala in South India felt God calling him to take the gospel to unreached people in North India. After obtaining a theological degree at Union Biblical Seminary, he set off to North India with his newly married wife. He knew little about the people to whom he was going. Since he was not sure exactly where they lived, it took him some time to find them. When he finally arrived, he realised how inadequately prepared he was. He had not anticipated the differences between his own culture and that of the people to whom he had come. He realised that he knew nothing about their beliefs and customs. The place where they lived was very different from his home in South India, and neither he nor his wife found it easy to adapt to the cold climate.

Their problems became worse when they had twins. His wife had no extended family to help her. They also found themselves involved in a level of spiritual warfare to which they were not accustomed. They wondered if they had made the right decision to come and they began to question their own faith. Did these people really need to hear the gospel? Was Jesus the only way of salvation?

It is important to note that this couple were not immature, untaught Christians. Some years later, the husband became a leader in the Indian Evangelical Mission, one of the largest indigenous missions in the country. The root of their problem was not a lack of dedication nor a lack of theological training, but a lack of cross-cultural preparation.

In 1987, a mission conference was held in Sao Paulo, attended by four thousand Latin American Christians, full of enthusiasm for world mission. In the next few years, hundreds of young men and women from Latin America were sent all over the world as missionaries. They had a deep desire to share the gospel and a confidence in the power

of the Holy Spirit. They had seen many people respond to the gospel in their own countries and believed that God would do the same in other parts of the world. They went out full of enthusiasm and with high expectations, but most had little or no preparation for cross-cultural ministry. They were unprepared for the problems that lay ahead. They didn't know how to adapt to a different culture. They didn't get the response or the converts they expected from their experience in their own countries. They weren't prepared for the difficulties and delays they encountered. In a short while, many went home, discouraged and broken. Some lost their faith, while others suffered broken marriages.

The churches that sent them out began to question: "Was it all worthwhile?" One Brazilian pastor said:

So many went out as missionaries with fire in their hearts and a burden to reach those who had never heard the gospel, but many have returned with a profound sense of failure and some of the churches that sent them are now questioning the validity of the whole missionary movement.

No new problem

This is no new problem. Prior to the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh (1910), a commission was set up to study current practices and provision for the preparation of missionaries. The twelve British participants met on ten separate occasions over a period of ten years and conducted a survey among missionary societies, colleges, and training institutions. The early chapters of their report considered current practices in the selection and training of missionary candidates.¹ Chapter four examined the general preparation that was required of different categories of missionaries. Missionaries who were to be ordained within the Church of England received their theological training at university or a theological college. While it was evident

God often spent decades preparing those who would play significant roles in the story of salvation.

that missionary ordinands received substantial theological education, the same was not the case when it came to the matter of specialised missionary training. Most mission boards were dissatisfied with the low status that missionary education received in theological colleges. At the same time, they also knew that missionary candidates formed only a small minority in such colleges and the curriculum was already overloaded. There appeared to be a general resignation that not much could be done to change the situation.

When it came to missionary candidates who were being sent out as teachers, some societies advised them to procure “missionary” training, but few societies made provision for it. One society provided no training for men, but insisted that women should do a year or two at a missionary training institution.² A similar situation pertained to medical missionaries. A few mission boards recommended doctors to undergo missionary training. Most did not. Some societies considered that the urgent needs of the field compelled them to send out doctors as soon as possible even though they would prefer them to undergo additional missionary training. One agency felt all they required was for the doctor to have “a real missionary spirit.”³ Most nurses were required to take

a course of missionary preparation, but some “missionary-hearted nurses” were sent out with no special training at all.

A number of mission societies sent out other missionaries to use their technical skills in developing the local economy and training national workers in various skills. These missionaries were often expected to play a full part in the evangelistic work of the mission, to lead Bible studies, or even to pastor churches. Yet they were given little or no preparation to equip them for this aspect of their work.

Although they were expected to assist in the spiritual side of the work and although they tend, when on the field, to claim an increasing share in it, they receive no training for it. Societies are apparently satisfied with technical efficiency and with general assurances as to Christian character.⁴

We need to ask whether much has changed or have we reverted to the inadequate practices of earlier times? In recent decades, there has been an increasing tendency for mission agencies and churches to discount the importance of pre-service training. Some recommend the reading of a few books or attendance at a weekend course. I have met people who serve with mission agencies both in the UK and in parts of

Asia where groups of people were being sent out to live and work in the Middle East after two weeks’ preparation. This seems to be the height of arrogance and irresponsibility. Do we place so little value on our need to understand the culture and beliefs of others in our attempts to share the good news of Jesus with them?

We are familiar with the arguments. The task is too urgent to delay. We must share the good news as soon as possible. We cannot pay for someone to attend a residential programme. Those we send out know the Lord. They have the Bible and they trust the Holy Spirit. What more is necessary? Surely that is all the first Christians had?

Such facile arguments trivialise the seriousness of the task. They ignore the fact that while God does at times work in unexpected ways, the first Christians, with a few notable exceptions, struggled in their attempts to share the gospel with people of other cultures and to establish a church in which Gentiles felt fully welcomed. They ignore the fact that God often spent decades preparing those who would play significant roles in the story of salvation. They ignore the fact that Paul was effective in reaching out to people of other races because he was familiar with their cultures and their literature.

The value of preparation

Perhaps one of the problems in our contemporary society is that we are impatient for results. We want to get on



with the task in hand. That is certainly how I felt. Both Rosemary and I had felt called to overseas ministry. We had both studied theology. We had both qualified as teachers. We had spent three years in fulltime ministry in a church. We were ready to go overseas, but then our mission asked us to undertake a further year's preparation for cross-cultural ministry. What was that about? Why did we need more training? That was my immediate reaction. But as we look back on that year we spent at All Nations Christian College, we do so with a huge sense of gratitude. It proved so valuable throughout our years of mission service.

We both greatly appreciated that time of preparation. It helped us to anticipate some of the challenges we would face as missionaries in Ethiopia. Those courses were so beneficial. It was helpful for me to have a basic knowledge of vehicle maintenance, especially since there was only one car mechanic that served two and a half million people in the province where we went to live. The carpentry course enabled me to build a swing and a slide for the children in our small garden. Our attempts at growing our own vegetables were less successful and, fortunately, we were never required to pull out each other's teeth! We were grateful for the practical skills we acquired at All Nations, but we appreciated even more the teaching that helped us to understand, appreciate, and relate to the cultures of other people. It removed our cultural blinkers. It stopped us from assuming that everything British was best or that we would be welcomed in Africa with open arms, but rather we might be received with mistrust and suspicion as those who belonged to a former colonial power. These things are taken for granted in our modern world, where technology enables us to encounter and, hopefully, appreciate cultures from around the world. But fifty years ago, most of us in the West were not so enlightened.⁵

We were encouraged to read books on cultural awareness, warning us of mistakes that can be made and the offence that can be caused if we fail to understand and appreciate cultures different from our own. The staff shared stories of the continuing arrogance and cultural insensitivity of some Western missionaries even in the period after the Second World War when most former colonies were gaining their independence. Perhaps one of the

most important lessons we learned at All Nations was that it was easy to look critically at the customs and traditions of others while being blind to the weaknesses and bias of our own culture. One lecturer told us the story of a little girl who went to France with her parents. As she sat at a restaurant waiting for her meal to be served, she observed the way the cutlery had been set out in front of her. "Mummy," she declared, "they have put the spoon and fork the wrong way round." She simply assumed that the way they did things at home in England was the right way and the way the French did things was wrong. It struck me at the time that, subconsciously, I had always assumed the way we did things in our country was correct and our culture was inevitably superior to that of others.⁶

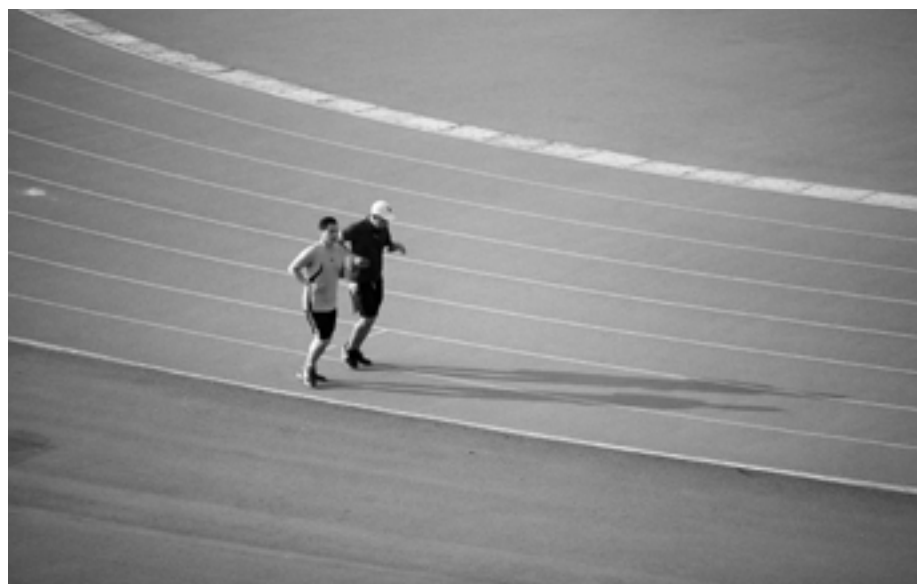
I found Eugene Nida's book *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions* particularly helpful as he pointed out that prejudice is universal.⁷ Everywhere in the world, people recognise the in-group to which they belong and the out-group, which means everyone else. They value their in-group because it gives them a sense of security and identity. They tend to look down on other groups as being inferior or even hostile. But we know as Christians that God has made every man, woman, and child in his image, and he has enriched our world through the multiplication of diverse cultures. I realised I needed to repent of my ethnocentricity and to learn to approach other cultures with greater respect and appreciation.

Patterns of preparation

While we recognise the value of the training we received, we realise that

the way we were prepared might not be suitable for everyone. In some cases, it may not be possible for people to undertake a prolonged period of residential study and preparation. The need to remain active and up-to-date in a medical career, for example, may reduce the amount of time that can be spent in the study of the Bible, theology, and missiology. Yet, in spite of that pressure on their time, many medical professionals recognise the importance of thorough preparation before they embark on a career of ministry in another country. During one year at All Nations, no fewer than fourteen medical doctors undertook a fulltime residential course.

It is also the case that there are many different ways of preparing for cross-cultural ministry. A wide range of books are available on theology of mission, the practice of mission, cultural understanding, and cross-cultural communication. Several organisations offer correspondence courses, which may include online seminars and personal tuition. After our retirement in 2006, we had the opportunity to lead a group of six members of our local church in working through the Perspectives Course. They were a highly motivated and intelligent group, and over a period of fifteen months we read through almost all the material recommended in that course and we met each month to discuss what we had read. It was hard work, but the group enjoyed it and benefitted from it immensely. One couple then went to serve in Kenya with the Africa Inland Mission and are still there. Another couple became engaged while doing the course and, after marriage, went to serve in Senegal. One member of the group married an ordinand and the





sixth member continued to serve as a very active but better-informed member of the church missionary committee.

It is possible today to earn a diploma or an MDiv online, though as someone has wisely commented, the kind of person who would do a three-year degree online is the kind of person who would probably try to do all their church ministry online. While some people learn through reading, others learn through doing. They can gain a great deal through involvement in ethnic communities or ministry among foreign students in their own country before they travel overseas. Others can benefit from short-term service overseas, where they begin to learn about the challenges of working in another culture. At All Nations, we observed that those who benefitted most from the course were those who had already worked for a time overseas. They had faced the challenges of cross-cultural life and witness, and were full of questions they wanted to think through. For some years, it became a virtual requirement for entry to the college that people had served overseas for a minimum of three months.

There are an increasing number of excellent colleges and training institutions around the world, and there can be great advantages of a period of study in the country in which one wishes to serve. It is possible today to spend a semester or even take a whole degree course overseas at a secular university. Someone who felt called to go to Japan as a missionary may be able to enrol in a Japanese university to obtain an English language-based degree at low or possibly no cost. They may be required to learn

Japanese as part of the programme. Similarly, it may be possible for some to undertake biblical and theological studies in the country where they are hoping to serve. However, it is important to note that some colleges simply replicate Western theological programmes and do not have a strong focus on relating the Scriptures to their cultural context. I remember visiting one leading seminary in Asia that encouraged their post-graduate students to undertake research on obscure facets of medieval theology rather than address the critical issues facing the church in their own country.

There are a host of options available for those who wish to prepare for long-term service and ministry in a country and culture not their own. Potential missionary candidates may choose a combination of the possibilities listed above. However, after fifty years of involvement in missionary agencies and in the training of missionaries, I am more convinced than ever that nothing can provide the same level of integrated and holistic preparation for cross-cultural service as a year-long residential programme.

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Consequences of inadequate preparation

If missionaries are sent out without adequate preparation, the consequences can be disastrous on themselves, their families, and their ministry. Many go out without being warned beforehand of the difficulties they may face. They are unable to speak the language. They have little understanding of the culture and the way things should be done. They may experience the pressures of isolation and hostility. They may see little response to their ministry. They may find it difficult to get used to the climate. They probably will succumb to local ailments. Sickness, fatigue, and discouragement may take their toll, and eventually those who set out with such high hopes may return home prematurely, dispirited, and disillusioned. In the worst cases, they may remain spiritual cripples for the rest of their lives, condemned by their own sense of failure.

The families of missionaries may also suffer unnecessarily during their time overseas if they are given insufficient pre-field training and orientation. Wives sometimes have no idea of what it will be like to run a home and raise a family in a foreign country. In many cases, they may never have been outside their own country or their own locality. When they arrive in their field of service, everything seems strange and unfamiliar. They cannot understand what people are saying. They cannot read the road signs or the labels in the shops. They dare not drive the car because of the state of the roads or the standard of local driving. Those with small children find it hard to find time for language study. Before they came, they may not have been sure that they wanted to be missionaries. Now they are sure that they don't! A thorough programme of cross-cultural training will not remove all these problems, but

it will help missionaries to prepare themselves and anticipate what may lie ahead. In some cases, a period of training may result in some couples not becoming missionaries at all. That may be a very important decision if it has become obvious that both do not share the same sense of call, or that one of them would not be able to cope with the stresses of missionary life.

The children of potential missionaries are equally important. Even quite small children can be helped to anticipate their new life and be prepared for the adventure that lies ahead. With older children, it is essential that their feelings and opinions are considered if the parents are contemplating becoming missionaries. Moving to another country and another culture will mean enormous changes for these young people. They also need adequate orientation.

Too many families have suffered because they were given insufficient preparation for missionary service; too many marriages have ended in divorce; too many wives have suffered breakdown or depression; too many children carry scars of bitterness because no one ever cared about their feelings. The burden of responsibility for providing adequate preparation rests with the churches and mission agencies that send them out.

Receiving churches also suffer adversely if missionaries are not trained properly for cross-cultural ministry. As one African church leader said to me:

These missionaries do not understand our culture. They are not interested in what we think or the way we do things. They simply want to do things the way they do them in their own countries.

Another African Christian said that he had given up trying to get some missionaries to listen to his views at all. "They've got their own ideas and nothing that we do or say will make them change their minds." He then went on to comment on the innumerable evangelistic strategies that are flooding into Africa from the West. He described them as evangelical toxic waste and went on to say: "These Christians do not bother to understand our culture, but they come to tell us how to evangelize our people!"

Both Western and non-Western missionaries need to develop a sensitive appreciation for other cultures. When they fail to do so, they are demonstrating the same colonial attitude that characterised some missionary endeavours in the past. When they impose their patterns of evangelism or church order on another people, they are

Excerpt from *The Cape Town Commitment*

3. Christ-centred leaders

The rapid growth of the Church in so many places remains shallow and vulnerable, partly because of the lack of disciplined leaders, and partly because so many use their positions for worldly power, arrogant status or personal enrichment. As a result, God's people suffer, Christ is dishonoured, and gospel mission is undermined. 'Leadership training' is the commonly-proposed priority solution. Indeed, leadership training programmes of all kinds have multiplied, but the problem remains, for two probable reasons.

First, training leaders to be godly and Christlike is the wrong way round. Biblically, only those whose lives already display basic qualities of mature discipleship should be appointed to leadership in the first place.⁸⁰ If, today, we are faced with many people in leadership who have scarcely been disciplined, then there is no option but to include such basic disciplining in their leadership development. Arguably the scale of un-Christlike and worldly leadership in the global Church today is glaring evidence of generations of reductionist evangelism, neglected

disciplining and shallow growth. The answer to leadership failure is not just more *leadership* training but better *discipleship* training. Leaders must first be disciples of Christ himself.

Second, some leadership training programmes focus on packaged knowledge, techniques and skills to the neglect of godly character. By contrast, authentic Christian leaders must be like Christ in having a servant heart, humility, integrity, purity, lack of greed, prayerfulness, dependence on God's Spirit, and a deep love for people. Furthermore, some leadership training programmes lack specific training in the one key skill that Paul includes in his list of qualifications – ability to teach God's Word to God's people. Yet Bible teaching is the paramount means of disciple-making and the most serious deficiency in contemporary Church leaders.

A) We long to see greatly intensified efforts in disciple-making, through the long-term work of teaching and nurturing new believers, so that those whom God calls and gives to the Church as leaders are qualified according to biblical criteria of maturity and servanthood.

B) We renew our commitment to pray for our leaders. We long that God would multiply, protect

and encourage leaders who are biblically faithful and obedient. We pray that God would rebuke, remove, or bring to repentance leaders who dishonour his name and discredit the gospel. And we pray that God would raise up a new generation of disciplined servant-leaders whose passion is above all else to know Christ and be like him.

- C) Those of us who are in Christian leadership need to recognize our vulnerability and accept the gift of accountability within the body of Christ. We commend the practice of submitting to an accountability group.
- D) We strongly encourage seminaries, and all those who deliver leadership training programmes, to focus more on spiritual and character formation, not only on imparting knowledge or grading performance, and we heartily rejoice in those that already do so as part of comprehensive 'whole person' leadership development.

⁸⁰ 1 Timothy 3:1–13; Titus 1:6–9; 1 Peter 5:1–3

The Lausanne Movement, *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011), 55–57.



guilty of ecclesiastical imperialism. It is not only the missionaries who suffer if they are given inadequate preparation for cross-cultural service, the people to whom they are sent also suffer.⁸

Critical areas of preparation

What then are the critical areas in which missionary candidates need to be thoroughly prepared and equipped? What is written here is necessarily selective as a single article cannot provide a comprehensive survey of everything that should be included in that process of preparation.

The spiritual life

Mission is no place for the faint hearted or the walking wounded. We must not send out people who are spiritual babies, let alone those who are spiritual cripples. We need people who can survive on their own spiritually in a lonely or hostile environment. They cannot presume that there will be a lively church and, if there is, they may not be able to understand the sermon. The music may be entirely different and they may not be able to join in the singing. They cannot presume there will be a dynamic small group where they can be encouraged every week. They may have little fellowship or means of spiritual nourishment. The critical question is: will they be able to cope? Have they learned to feed themselves from the word of God? Do they have sufficient knowledge of the Scriptures that they can not only sustain their own walk with God but also teach and minister to others?

In Mark 3:14, we read that Jesus called the twelve apostles to be with him. He wanted them to spend time with him, to learn from him, to observe his life and his example. Only after they had established their relationship with him did he send them out. In the same way, the basis for involvement in ministry must be a personal relationship with the One in whose name we go, a relationship that is developing as we respond to all the means of grace that God has made available to us.

The Cape Town Commitment, which was published after the Third Lausanne Congress, devoted three pages to a discussion of spiritual leadership—“Christ-centred leaders.” It pointed out that some leadership programmes focus on “packaged knowledge, techniques and skills to the neglect of godly character.” It went on to recommend that authentic Christian leaders must have a “servant heart, humility, integrity, purity, lack of greed, prayerfulness, dependence on God’s Spirit and a deep love for people.”⁹

Similar criteria should surely be applied to all those who seek to be ministers of the gospel. If the missionary candidate has no established and secure relationship with their Saviour, they will hardly be able to convince others to put their faith in him. If they are not living in dependence on God and the power of his Holy Spirit, they will be severely limited in their attempts to serve the community to whom they go. If there is no dynamic personal faith, no evidence of a personal relationship with God, the words that they share will sound hollow and unconvincing. As one

friend of mine, who was working in Bangladesh, said: “If people do not see Jesus in me, I might as well go home.”

Character development

Throughout the New Testament, there is a strong emphasis on the character of those who preach the gospel and minister within the church. The qualities of an elder or deacon, described in the Pastoral Epistles, focus not on academic ability or ministerial gifts (except that of the ability to teach), but on character and the spiritual life. When seven deacons were appointed in Acts 6, they were chosen not because they had great administrative gifts or accounting ability, but because they were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. When the church at Antioch heard the voice of God telling them to send out Saul and Barnabas, the elders of the church knew these two men were well suited for the task to which they were being called. Saul had proved his courage and zeal to preach the gospel. Barnabas was known as a good man who was able to encourage others. They were both regarded as trustworthy and had been given the responsibility of taking gifts of money from Antioch to the church in Jerusalem.

Since the New Testament Epistles lay such an emphasis on the character of those who are ministers of the gospel, it should also be a priority in any programme that seeks to equip men and women for ministry.

The local church makes an enormous contribution to the spiritual growth and development of the missionary candidate. That is where they are converted and grow in maturity, where they progress in their understanding of the faith, where they first enjoy fellowship with other Christians and begin to understand the nature of the church. This is where they take their first faltering steps in Christian ministry and service. The members of the local church not only help the individual to grow in their Christian faith and practice, they are also in a better position than anyone to assess the suitability of the candidate for future ministry or missionary work.

However, in most churches, especially those with large congregations, it is not possible for the pastors or church leaders to know each individual in depth. They

may be aware of their strengths and gifts, but they may not have recognised other facets of their personality or weaknesses in their character.

Many who offer for missionary service carry some personal emotional baggage from the past, for example: dysfunctional backgrounds, experience of abuse, and problems with guilt or bitterness. Unless they receive help in these areas, there may be problems later with serious consequences for the individual and their ministry.

Leaving one's own cultural milieu and moving into a different cultural context involves much loss and change. A critical question for any training programme is how candidates will react to these challenges and how they can be prepared to handle them.

Preparation for missionary service must address these issues and provide the context in which candidates can grow in self-awareness, work through personal issues, find pastoral help, and develop a more Christ-like character.

Self-awareness and humility

Some missionary candidates have an exalted picture of themselves and what they are going to achieve. They have unrealistic ideas about their gifts and abilities. They need to realise "that they will not be the inestimable and highly important asset and gift to the church to which they go that they and their congregation had fondly imagined."¹⁰ They need to follow the Pauline injunction not to think of themselves more highly than they ought, but to see themselves from God's perspective (Rom 12:3).

In the past, there was a tendency among some missionaries to feel a sense of superiority towards people of other ethnic groups. The report of the Commission on Missionary Training from the Edinburgh conference stated:

The white man so instinctively feels that he is lord of creation, that it is hard for him, no matter how Christian he may be, to get over the idea that men of a different

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colour are his inferiors. He is apt to be brusque and peremptory. He is always in a hurry and impatient of delays.¹¹

An African pastor said to a group of Western missionary candidates: "If you come to Africa, do not come as if you were the fourth member of the Trinity." But white people are not the only ones who can feel a sense of racial superiority. Many people of different nationalities feel that they are superior to other people, and they exhibit their ethnocentricity in things they say and attitudes they adopt.

In the great mission conferences of the twentieth century, the need for partnership in the missionary endeavour was expressed repeatedly. Edinburgh (1910) declared: "The missionary should be encouraged constantly to seek counsel from the officers and leaders of the national church."¹² At the conference of the International Missionary Council

held in Tambaram (1938), it was stated: "Missionaries had to be willing to work under the direction of national leaders. They had to be free from any sense of racial, cultural, spiritual superiority and denominational narrowness."¹³

Perhaps little has changed. In his book *Cross-cultural Servanthood*, Duane Elmer describes how, during his travels to many parts of the world, he often asked local Christians how they perceive the missionaries who have come to work among them. "What could missionaries do to more effectively minister the gospel of Christ in your culture?" he asked. The answers he received surprised him. He writes:

Many said that they valued the missionary presence and the love they felt for them. But many said, with hesitation but conviction, "Missionaries could more effectively minister the gospel of Christ if they did not think they were so superior to us."¹⁴

Still, in much missionary work today, whether the workers come from Asia or the West, there is the desire to be in control, to want to introduce new programmes, to tell the local people what they need and what they ought to do, and to impose on them new ways of doing things, new patterns of worship, and new styles of church leadership. This is just another form of imperialism, which militates against the growth of a healthy, mature national church.

Students need to understand their own culture and its influence on them. They need to be warned against assuming that their cultural way of doing things is normative and superior to other patterns of behaviour. In addition, they need to be prepared for culture shock and be encouraged to become bi-cultural people capable of appreciating another culture as much as their own.





Missiological reflection

According to Dr. Tai Woong Lee, Director of Global Ministries Study Center, a leading missionary training institute in Korea, a high priority in any missionary training programme is to encourage the trainees to develop their own theology of mission.

Initially, students may study the biblical basis of mission, tracing the biblical vision for the nations of the world from the early chapters of Genesis to the eschatological climax in Revelation. Topics might include the universality of the Abrahamic covenant, the role of Israel as a light to the nations, and the distinctive missiological perspectives of the different New Testament writers. Students could also be required to read classic missionary texts like Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours*.¹⁵

Missionary candidates must also learn lessons from the past. They are not the first Christians to go out into the world to share the good news of Jesus Christ. For two thousand years, others have gone out before them, showing great courage and determination. If the new generation of missionaries will learn from their predecessors, they will be able to emulate their example and avoid their mistakes.

Students need to explore major areas of debate in the modern missiological scene and examine how Christians from differing traditions have developed their understanding of mission. They need to address issues like the nature of mission; its motives and aim; general revelation; the theology of religion; salvation and its socio-political implications; dialogue and

proclamation; witness and proselytism; syncretism and accommodation.

Those who feel called to minister in Asia should read books by theologians from Asia as well as the West. The choice will depend, of course, on where they intend to serve, but helpful examples might include: *Mangoes or Bananas?* by Hwa Yung; *Water Buffalo Theology* by Kosuke Koyama; and *The Message of Mission* by Vinoth Ramachandra (with Howard Peskett).¹⁶

Cross-cultural hermeneutics

The more I travelled the more I became aware that Christians in other countries read the Bible differently from the way I do. They notice things I don't notice. They become excited about things I considered irrelevant. They understand things that are a complete mystery to me.

When I was preaching on the call of Abraham in Tanzania, I spoke about God's call, God's demands, God's promise, and Abraham's response. I thought I had been reasonably faithful to the text, but afterwards the Anglican bishop rebuked me for leaving out one of the most important parts of the passage. "What was that?" I asked. The bishop replied: "You said nothing about the curse. God promised to curse everyone who cursed Abraham. In Africa curses are very important." He was right. In many cultures, curses

are treated very seriously and the Bible talks a great deal about curses. In fact, there are over 200 references to curses in Scripture, but I have never heard a sermon on the curses of the Bible! Yet here is an important facet of biblical teaching. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (Gal 3:13). Jesus also delivers us from all those who would harm us with their curses, for he has triumphed over all the forces of evil (Col 2:15).

In many parts of the world, people follow a lifestyle that bears many similarities to that of the ancient Near East. The way of life of the Falasha in Ethiopia, among whom we worked for three years, was remarkably similar to the agrarian society of first-century Palestine. The same is true in many other parts of the world. People from such backgrounds find it much easier to understand and relate to stories and customs found in the Bible that the Westerner finds strange or incomprehensible. Sacrifice is widely practised among many traditional societies. Ideas of kingship and covenant are common in Africa. Genealogies have a great significance in nomadic societies, for your genealogy determines your identity and role in society. Dreams are taken seriously in many cultures and are often assumed to be messages from the spirit world.

It is critical that students grapple with issues of contextualisation and learn to discern how Christian truth can be expressed within a given context. How far can ideas, illustrations, or religious practices be adapted from the recipient culture without running the risk of syncretism? The writings of people like S. B. Bevans and Paul Hiebert provide useful guidelines to different approaches that are followed in contextualisation.¹⁷

Understanding the contemporary world

Things have changed a great deal in the past fifty years. Ease of international travel and the rapid development of communications technology have made a huge difference to our understanding of the world. Yet those who feel called to go and serve in another country often

We need to ask what issues globalisation raises for the church and how far the church is caught up in this process.

We need to address issues of spiritual maturity, character, self-awareness, cultural sensitivity, humility, biblical knowledge, and missiological understanding. We need to send out those who understand something of the challenges they face and are equipped to cope with the challenges of culture and witness.

have only a superficial understanding of the changes taking place in our world and even less awareness of the religious, social, political, and economic trends within the society where they are expecting to work.

Questions need to be addressed about the impact of urbanisation and globalisation. Who has benefited from the global market? Who has become richer? Who has suffered through the process of globalisation? What new job opportunities does the global market afford to Christian professionals or English teachers? What social and ethical problems result from the rapid migration to the cities? What issues does this raise for the church? Is the national church addressing these issues?

What has been the impact of the rapid development of information technology? What new challenges and opportunities does it bring to the Christian church? What temptations does it bring also? How does IT impact missionary endeavour, the spread of the gospel, and the place of religious dialogue and Christian apologetic?

A further consequence of the process of globalisation is seen in what Thomas Friedman at the end of the twentieth century described as the homogenising of culture.¹⁸ This was most clearly evidenced in the younger generation wherever they lived: dancing to the same music, wearing the same clothes, watching the same movies, playing the same video games, admiring the same heroes. Friedman pointed out that globalisation had its own dominant culture, which is essentially Western. “Culturally speaking,” he wrote, “globalization is largely, though not entirely, the spread of Americanization . . . on a global scale.” We need to ask what issues globalisation raises for the church and how far the church is caught up in this process.

Os Guinness observed that nothing had weakened the church in the West more than modernity.¹⁹ It was the Christian church that contributed to the rise of the modern world, but the modern world, in its turn, has undermined the Christian church. The challenge that has come to the church in other parts of the world is how to contextualise the gospel in their particular context. Whether missionaries are sent out from the West or other parts of the world, they must understand the impact of modernity on society and be equipped to proclaim the Christian message in an appropriate and relevant way.

Preparing to face opposition and persecution

Jesus warned his disciples that they must be prepared to suffer for the cause of the gospel. When he sent out seventy disciples, he told them: “I send you out like lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:3). When he spoke to the apostles at the last supper, he made it very clear that they would face opposition and rejection. “If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18).

Today, in many countries of the world, Christians face opposition and persecution. Pastors are put in prison and churches burned down. Those who proclaim their faith face both prejudice and discrimination. Missionaries must not only be prepared to evangelise and plant churches. They must also be prepared to face criticism and rejection, and to help new converts and local leaders to face opposition and persecution.

Margaretha Adiwardana, a Brazilian mission leader born in Indonesia, researched the phenomenon of missionary attrition for a master’s degree. She observed that the prevalent culture in Brazil shaping the lives of these young missionaries discouraged

an attitude of perseverance. It did not prepare them for future disappointment or discouragement. She proposed a holistic training programme that addressed this issue and would enable Brazilian missionaries to persevere in situations of adversity.²⁰

The need to prevent unnecessary attrition

We have already noted the high rate of missionary attrition among Latin American missionaries during the last decades of the twentieth century. In 1993, participants in a Brazilian national mission conference were shocked at the report given by a respected mission leader that “75% of Brazil’s cross-cultural missionaries quit their posts during their initial five-year term of service or don’t return after their first furlough.”²¹ In the following year, the WEF Missions Commission decided to undertake a global study on missionary attrition. In 1997, the results of that research, conducted among the fourteen most prominent sending nations, was published. It identified inadequate pre-field training as one of the primary causes for missionary attrition.²²

While we long to see the good news of Jesus spread throughout the world, it is imperative that we do not send out missionary candidates who are ill-prepared. We must avoid repeating the mistakes identified both at Edinburgh 1910 and in the 1997 WEFMC report. We need to address issues of spiritual maturity, character, self-awareness, cultural sensitivity, humility, biblical knowledge, and missiological understanding. We need to send out those who understand something of the challenges they face and are equipped to cope with the challenges of culture and witness. If we do not learn from the lessons of the past, and if we fail to provide adequate preparation for those we send out, and if they return home broken and disillusioned, the fault will lie not with them but with the churches and mission agencies who sent them. **MRT**

¹ World Missionary Conference, *Report of Commission V: The Preparation of Missionaries* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier and New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1910).

² World Missionary Conference, *Report of Commission V*, 41.

³ World Missionary Conference, *Report of Commission V*, 43.

⁴ World Missionary Conference, *Report of Commission V*, 46.

⁵ David and Rosemary Harley, *Together in Mission: From All Nations to All Nations* (London: Monarch, 2022), 41.

⁶ Harley and Harley, *Together in Mission*, 42.

⁷ Eugene A. Nida, *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions* (New York: Harper, 1954; Pasadena: William Carey, 1975).

⁸ David Harley, *Preparing to Serve: Training for Cross-cultural Mission* (Pasadena: William Carey, 1995), 8–9, <https://passionexchange.files.wordpress.com/2008/10/preparing-to-serve.pdf>.

⁹ *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action* (The Lausanne Movement, 2013), 55–57.

¹⁰ Gwenyth Hubble, “Reasons for Missionary Training,” *IRM* 52 (1963): 263. Gwenyth Hubble served for many years as principal of a missionary training centre in Britain.

¹¹ World Missionary Conference, *Report of Commission V*, 103.

¹² World Missionary Conference, *Report of*

Commission V, 102.

¹³ International Missionary Council, *The World Mission of the Church: Findings and Recommendations of the IMC, Tambaram, Madras, India, December 12th to 29th, 1938* (New York: Missionary Council, 1938), 83.

¹⁴ Duane Elmer, *Cross-cultural Servanthood* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 15.

¹⁵ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (London: World Dominion, 1956; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

¹⁶ Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum, 1997); Kosuke Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1974); Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission: The Glory of Christ in All Time and Space*, *The Bible Speaks Today*: Bible Themes (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003).

¹⁷ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, *Faith and Cultures* (Maryknoll, NY:

Orbis, 2002). Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986).

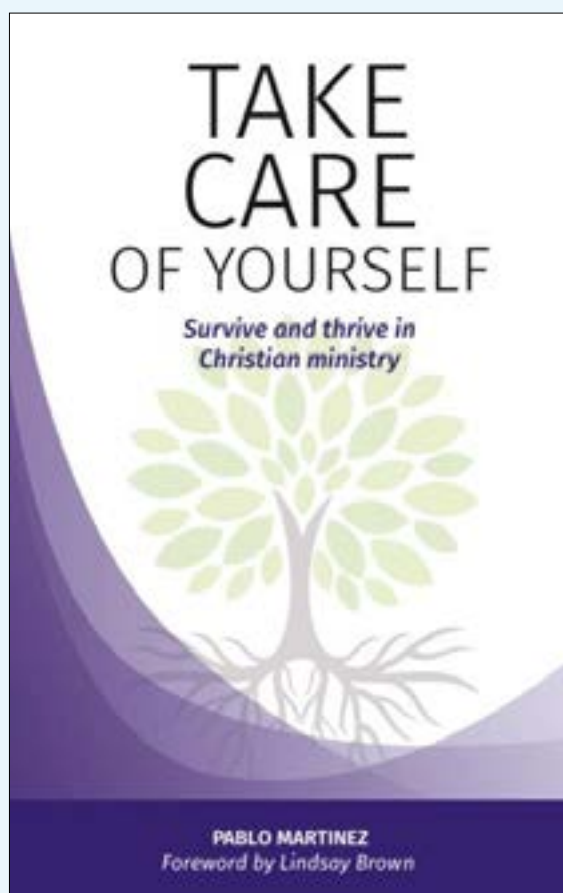
¹⁸ Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: Farrer, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 8.

¹⁹ Os Guinness, “Mission Modernity,” in *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel*, ed. Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Carlisle: Regnum, 1999), 293.

²⁰ Margaretha Adiwardana, “Training Missionaries to Persevere: Wholistic Preparation for Situations of Adversity” (MTh thesis, Discipleship Training Centre, Singapore, 1999).

²¹ Jonathan Lewis, “Designing the ReMAP Project,” in *Too Valuable to Lose: Exploring the Causes and Cures of Missionary Attrition*, ed. William D. Taylor (Pasadena: William Carey, 1997), 77.

²² William D. Taylor, ed., *Too Valuable to Lose: Exploring the Causes and Cures of Missionary Attrition* (Pasadena: William Carey, 1997).



Take Care of Yourself: Survive and Thrive in Christian Ministry

Pablo Martinez. Oxford: Dictum, 2018. ISBN 978-1683071785. 112pp.

The book is also published as part of the Lausanne Library series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018).

Reviewed by Beverlea Parkhill

“Keep watch over yourselves” (Acts 20:28).

This short book is a commentary on the above verse and is for anyone seeking to thrive in ministry for the long haul. Pablo Martinez states that “the problem is not working too hard, but resting (renewing) too little” (2). This book is a caution for those of us who often neglect our own care for the sake of the gospel work we are involved in. In only 100 pages drawn from his background in pastoral psychology, Martinez gives succinct pointers and practical advice on how to care for ourselves and avoid burnout in ministry.

While a lot of the material provided in the book is not new or innovative, it reminds us of our need for rest and renewal. This includes the reasons we need rest (chapter 1), the need for *regular* times of rest—daily, weekly, and annually (chapter 2), and the mistakes and dangers of not taking rest (chapter 3). Chapter 4 contains constructive strategies for guarding our wellbeing. Chapter 5 looks at the need for diligence in our own spiritual nourishment. Martinez includes an appendix containing additional material on dealing with our pasts. Although it feels somewhat

disconnected from the rest of the book, the information here is helpful. He also provides some thoughtful questions for study and reflection at the end of book.

One of the more helpful illustrations in the book is found in chapter 2, where Martinez uses the vineyard as a metaphor for our lives.

They made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept!
(Song of Songs 1:6b, ESV).

Martinez highlights our responsibility to care for our own vineyard/life under God. This is part of good stewardship of our physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. The illustration of the vineyard continues through the ideas of pruning, watering, and waiting.

I recommend *Take Care of Yourself* to anyone who is struggling or wanting to avoid burnout. I will finish with a quote from Lindsay Brown's foreword:

For some, this book will be exhilarating, for others it will be liberating, and for many, it will be an eye-opener. My prayer is that for all readers it will be a source of enrichment and joy. (ix)

Our Missionary Journey

Asholi Akamu



Rev. Asholi Akamu and his wife Puii are from Northeast India, where he worked in students' ministry with the Council of Baptist Churches and served as the Executive Secretary of Mao Baptist Churches Association. Asholi and Puii joined OMF Mekong Field in 2002 and have worked among the Akha people group. They have four children and one granddaughter.

Introduction

My father was the third convert in our village. After receiving Jesus Christ, my parents became very active in proclaiming the good news. When the first church and its property were forcefully occupied by the Indian army, my parents offered to build the church on their land. I remember worshiping in this little church with a grass roof and mud walls. The singing was so warm and heartfelt. As a small child, I remember the members were so united, so full of joy and happiness. All the church members would go out to neighboring villages to share the gospel. They would go and help people in need and give generously.

After third grade, I transitioned from a government school to a new school that my parents, along with some Christian friends, had started. It was in this school that I really came to know the true God personally. We heard stories about Jesus and also stories about missionaries who went to China, Myanmar, Africa, India, and other places. After coming to know the true Almighty God, I developed the courage not to fear the evil spirits any longer. I said to myself, "This is it! I am going to have this God—Jesus Christ—as my God, and make him my Savior, Lord, and King." From then on, there was no turning back.

The call

Since childhood, whenever I listened to stories about the lives of missionaries, I wished that one day I too would become one of them. But it wasn't until later that I saw how that would come to fruition. As my wife Puii is a second-generation missionary—the daughter of Rev. Zauva and Awii, who worked among the Akha people in Thailand—the word "missionary" was not foreign to her. While she was still single, she too had committed herself to be "a missionary" somewhere, someday.

After I graduated from college, I went to Bible school, received my BD degree, and worked in youth ministry for six years doing campus ministry. Puii and I were married in 1993 and God blessed us with four children. After we got married, we served in our church association in my hometown for six years. In 1995, my father went to be with the Lord. Before he died, he gave us the assurance that he would be happy for us to do anything that God calls us to do, even serving in the mission field. It was at that time that my term in the church association was ending and a few calls came, inviting my family to work with missions in different regions. Two of these calls were from Thailand. One was to work among refugees, and the other was to work with OMF among the Akha people.

Our local church was divided about our going. One side wanted my family and me to stay so that I could take over as senior pastor since our senior pastor had just passed away. The other group said that the church had been fervently praying to send out one of their own missionaries and we were God's answer to the prayers. We waited upon the Lord, trusting that he would open the door for us. Finally, everyone came to the agreement that if this is the will of God, no one could stop us from going and they gave us their blessing.

How did it start?

However, we found out it was not easy to join OMF. There were several things we needed to complete. One of the biggest preparation requirements we had was going to the five-month-long missionary candidate training course. This was organized by the Indian Evangelical Mission (IEM) in Tamil Nadu state, South India, and the journey there was one-and-a-half days by bus, plus three days and two nights by train. Since our children were going to school, we could not go together for the training. For this reason, I went first, while Puii stayed back with the kids. After I

finished, my wife went the following year for the same training with our son, who was just six months old, while I stayed home with the three girls.

When I was about to leave to attend the course, my mother became seriously ill. Before I went, I visited her in the hospital. She blessed me to go ahead to do God's will and not to worry for her. Deep down in my heart, I had a feeling that I would never see her again; however, she was so insistent that I go. She said,

Son, go! Don't worry for me. Go for the training. Put all your trust in the Lord and serve the Lord with all your heart and do your best for the Lord. God will be with you and with me. My life and your life are only in God's hand. Whether I die or live, it's in God's hands.

The day for me to leave came and I said goodbye to my mother, my wife, and my children and left for Outreach Training Institute in Mugalapali, South India.

I counted each day, week, and month, expecting and hoping to see my mother alive, but when I had only two more weeks to go, that fateful day came when she passed away. It was very difficult to accept. Suddenly, I missed her so much! However, her words of encouragement and assurance before we parted flashed through my mind and rang through my ears, and comforted and ministered to me. To this day, this story speaks loudly to many people who have lost their loved ones when they are away doing God's work.

After the training, we thought we would be going soon, but that was far

from the truth. Filling in forms and getting immunizations for six family members wasn't an easy job, and it was made much more difficult as we lived in a rural village. Because it took so long, sometimes we started to doubt in our hearts if we could ever make it through. This was a big struggle for us.

However, we had committed ourselves and our family to serve God, no matter what. We had made Joshua 24:15 our family's theme verse. I wrote a song on the theme, and sang

which we are forever grateful—but we still found the remaining financial need to be staggering. One day, my siblings came to our house to pray together and they decided that no single family or individual could afford that big amount and so they unanimously decided to sell their shared lands for the sake of the mission for the Lord. They said, "Whatever amount you get from it, use it for your needs." So, by the time we left, we had more than we needed. In addition, on the commissioning day, not a single person



it as a testimony, "... Choose you this day whom you will serve, but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Finally, after three years of preparation, we received the welcome letter from OMF to join the Thailand field and go to Singapore for the orientation course. But we faced another obstacle—we had no money to purchase the plane tickets needed for the trip. Our church decided to contribute the majority of the amount for the plane tickets—for

who came to shake our hands was empty-handed. We were so moved and blessed by their love for the Lord, their love for the lost, and their love for us.

Joys and challenges of learning new languages and cultures

When we moved to Thailand, we found ourselves having to adjust to three different cultures. Adjusting to the Thai and Akha cultures was not a great challenge for us. These cultures felt familiar and we quickly felt at home. The culture that was the most different from what we were used to was the Western culture, the predominant culture of the organization. For this reason, we struggled to adjust to new ways of living and doing things, but we appreciated our colleagues' humility and helpfulness as we navigated new waters.

We greatly appreciated the way OMF ran the Language and Culture Learning Centre in Lopburi and the many kinds of support they gave to new missionaries so that they could adapt to their new environment more easily. This experience helped us to learn new things during our first year in Thailand. Before the



term for my Thai language learning ended, I switched to learning Akha, while my wife continued learning Thai.

Because there were no books for learning the Akha language, my father-in-law, Rev. Zauva, quickly prepared Akha lessons and made arrangements for me to stay in an Akha village to learn the language. He engaged an Akha evangelist to come and teach me after his day's work. The villagers built me a hut with

the beginning, it was strange and new for us to raise support by ourselves. Many times, we wished that the organization would raise it for us and we would have been satisfied with any amount they raised. Sometimes, knowing that we were under-supported, we almost felt inferior to our missionary friends. When friends and others talked so much about their ministry project funds, while we could barely raise support to meet our basic family needs, what should we do?



a thatched roof, split bamboo walls, and bamboo floors. They also built me a small toilet out of the same materials. The hut had so many holes that I had to make double walls with plastic sheets and, of course, it became very cozy.

My wife stayed back in Maesai, as our son was attending a Thai school there, and continued Thai language study. I would sometimes join the villagers to plant rice, go fishing, or play with the village children. But most days, I was alone. Dust would pour into my house while chickens ran around under the floors. I would often stare at the thatched roof and wonder what I was doing there. Previously, I had been an executive secretary and associate pastor and I had been busy with so many tasks, but now, I spent day after day by myself. In the evenings, when my language tutor came for the lessons, insects swarmed in through the bamboo walls (especially in the summer) and we both huddled inside double mosquito nets, studying by candlelight. But in my times of questioning, the answer always came. I was there to learn the language so that I could witness and share the gospel with these people. Had there not been a call and commitment, I would have been overcome and returned home.

Challenge of support raising

Raising support was one of our greatest challenges in our missionary journey. In

We often felt lost about how to raise our own funds and support. In the beginning, we asked ourselves, "How are we supposed to raise support when the policy was that we should not ask?" As time went by, we saw God's faithfulness and learned the meaning of the principle "do not ask money from people" more and more. Later, when our family was adopted by OMF's Singapore National Office as foster members, our support level slowly increased. In the midst of our fears and lack, God's faithfulness proved true again and again.

When we look back now, we are speechless as to how our four children were able to live in an international dorm and study in an international school and how they could all pursue their tertiary education abroad. God always supplied each need, just in time. At times, individuals just came forward with specific gifts for our children's education. This has left us with great testimonies about how each of them received their education support.

In my times of questioning, the answer always came. I was there to learn the language so that I could witness and share the gospel with these people. Had there not been a call and commitment, I would have been overcome and returned home.

We can confidently say that we have been able to stay and survive in the field because of faithful prayer and financial supporters in different countries. Yes, our God sees our needs and he supplies them accordingly in his perfect timing. However, this was, and is, and will be a big challenge for prospective candidates who come from a background such as ours.

Children and education

Our three girls went to a Montessori school for about eight months, the only English medium school we found in Chiangrai. My parents-in-law graciously took care of them for about one year while we studied language and culture in Central Thailand. However, we found that the Montessori education system and the Indian education system were very different. We wanted to send them to a school that would be similar to what we knew, and we found there was only one, which was in Chiangmai. After much prayer we decided to let them stay in an OMF dorm that was then called River House (now known as Mountain View) so that they could attend Grace International School. After three years, our son Azuo joined his sisters as a first grader.

It was hard parting with them, but we didn't want the feeling to overwhelm us, and we overcame it with the help of God. The desire for them to have a good education was strong in our hearts. That helped us to go through the parting, for which we now rejoice.

As our children grew up in the dorm, we tried our best to encourage them in their personal lives, studies, and spiritual walk. We tried to encourage them through letters, emails, and phone calls. Whenever they came home during holidays, we tried to be very intentional with training and teaching them because we had only a limited amount of time. The children may have become tired of those teachings but we prevailed by focusing on what the results could

We give much of the credit for how our children turned out to the two long-term dorm parents and, when they were on home assignment, the other two dorm parents who deputized for them, as well as a number of dorm assistants who came and went over the years. These people made the dorm for the children feel like a home away from home. They did so much on our behalf by taking on many necessary tasks so that we could serve in our ministry without any worries. We cannot omit mentioning Grace International School (GIS) in Chiangmai either. If it wasn't for GIS, we wonder how our children would have turned out. Besides providing a very good education, it was a place where the children were able to develop their spiritual lives, social lives, and good character. It was truly a place of all-round development.

A group of seven people are posed for a photograph outdoors. On the far left is a man in a white short-sleeved shirt and dark trousers. Next to him is an elderly woman in traditional Hmong clothing, including a dark jacket, a patterned skirt, and a headscarf. In the center are five women, all dressed in traditional Hmong attire. They wear dark jackets over brightly colored blouses (green, pink, blue, and purple), patterned skirts, and headscarves with red and white details. They also have colorful beaded necklaces and patterned leg coverings. On the far right is a woman in a pink polo shirt and dark trousers, standing next to a young child in a light blue shirt and jeans. The background features a thatched-roof building and lush green hills under a clear sky.



When children are away from us

We praise God that our children are walking in his way thus far. Some of them are serving him with their own limited gifts and abilities. Currently, our oldest daughter, Penpen, is with Cru Singapore. Our second daughter, Dondon, graduated with a master's degree from Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. She is married to Taylor Baird and the Lord has blessed them with a daughter, Mercy, who is eight months old. Both of them are praying that one day, God willing, they will serve the Lord in Asia. Our third daughter, Shanshan, is back with us here in Thailand and has been working with an NGO called TonCedar (Cedar Tree) since February 2022. Our son, Azuo, was studying in Michigan and graduated in May 2022. He has enrolled to continue his studies by doing a master's program in intercultural studies.

Conclusion

Along our missionary journey, we have faced challenges, like losing my parents while preparing to become missionaries, raising four children while our support levels were low, learning new languages, and sending our children away for education. But we could press on because we stood on the shoulders of those who had given so sacrificially, who had also counted the cost in sending and supporting us, and also lost something. We never allowed the challenges to become stumbling blocks. Our eyes were fixed on Jesus. We had faith that if he is the one who brought us out to work among the Akha people, he would supply our needs. We never had a moment when we wanted to quit. We were convinced of Jesus' promise when he said, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). **MRT**

Not All Those Who Wander Are Lost¹

Lydia

Lydia joined OMF in autumn 2011 and served among an unreached people group. Her journey on the field has had several twists and turns. She is thankful for how God guided her through these and for what he taught her along the way. Lydia enjoys settling in her new location and is about to take on a leadership role for her field.

It is somewhat ironic that someone who was originally called to serve a nomadic people should end up wandering around between Europe and Asia for three years.”

As I read this comment from my center leader about the journey I had been on before I moved to my current location, I could only agree that it was ironic indeed.

When I came to Asia in 2011, it was with the desire to be a blessing to an unreached nomadic people and to live out my calling as a follower of Jesus among them. They are a hospitable people who take great pride in their ethnic identity, but whose lifestyle has changed significantly over the years due to changes in their environment. They deeply cherish all of creation around them, yet have so little opportunity to get to know the Creator as the Good Shepherd.

I love the concept of a long obedience in the same direction² and arrived committed to serve for the long term. This probably meant, even though I may not have been aware of it at the time, that I expected to serve this particular people in the same location for a good number of years.

Things turned out quite differently, however. I did not realise it then, but, over the next few years, God would take me on a journey that kept me moving in the same direction whilst gradually changing and broadening the nature of my ministry. I have felt lost and confused at times amidst closed doors and long periods of waiting when God was at work in ways I could not fully



foresee. How did I make it through some of these disappointments and redirections? What kept me going?

When I returned to Asia after my first home assignment, the situation in our area had changed. This had a significant impact on local people especially—who were going through a lot of suffering—and on our ability to renew visas and get permission to stay in the area. Towards the end of 2017, several foreign workers had had to leave. When the time came for my roommate and myself to renew our visas, we were expecting a challenging and longer-than-usual process and so we started early. It became gradually clear, however, that we would not be able to renew our visas before the expiry

date. We decided to pack up our apartment “just in case,” and left our home, not knowing if and when we would be able to return.

In the months leading up to this difficult departure, I had been reading through passages in the Old Testament in my quiet times. I had been wrestling with the challenging situation in our location and with the uncertainty of how things might develop. Reading through the Psalms and Isaiah provided much needed perspective on the circumstances I was facing. Isaiah emphasised that God was still on the throne, even when so much around me seemed to be out of control. Isaiah gave hope, by highlighting God’s work and faithfulness throughout the centuries and reminding me that he is fulfilling his plan no matter what. Isaiah helped me to see and experience God’s love and care as the one who is our Shepherd and carries the lambs close to his heart.

To this day I am thankful for what God taught me during that time and for how he helped me shift my focus from the circumstances to himself. God had to remind me of these lessons many times in the years that followed.

In the months after we left our home in Asia, it became clear that many of us, including myself, were not going to be able to return to our area because we were no longer granted a visa. We had to face the difficult reality that most of us could no longer continue to live and serve among this people. These circumstances forced me and my colleagues to consider what God was actually calling us to do. Instead of asking how and where we wanted to serve,

It became a process in which we grieved the loss of a place and people we had come to love, and the loss of our own plans and dreams for what ministry together would look like.

we realised that the real question was how and where *God* wanted us to serve. What would it take to see this people reached with the good news of Jesus? And would we be willing to be available to him in the way he wanted to use us?

It became a process in which we grieved the loss of a place and people we had come to love, and the loss of our own plans and dreams for what ministry together would look like. As we prayed and explored next steps, we saw *God* opening doors to new ways of ministry; opportunities for work among diaspora, online ministry, and mobilising the local church.

Being more of a detail-oriented person myself, pursuing a vision had never been a major motivator for me up till then. But the experience of having to leave my ministry location coincided with a period in which I deputised as center leader. Through the difficulties and the setbacks, as well as through engaging with the bigger picture as a deputy center leader, *God's* heart for the nations and, in particular, his love for the unreached people groups in our field, became more alive to me. I began to realise the importance of vision when seeking guidance and deciding on next steps. The vision to see these peoples reached with the good news of Jesus had not changed. This made me willing to “throw the net off the other side of the boat” (John 21:6), even if it meant having to start all over again in a new location. Despite the difficult circumstances faced by these people, the vision helped me see that *God* was still at work among them. And I wanted to join him in that.

From the start, when we began exploring new ministry opportunities, the option of getting involved in mobilising and journeying with the local church stood out to me. In the months that followed, *God* seemed to affirm this direction, and so I began to pursue a student visa to study in a new location. At this point, I was back in my home country to update my prayer partners regarding my ministry and to share the new direction in which I thought I was going. Unexpectedly,

there turned out to be a delay in the visa paperwork. Instead of moving to my new ministry location, we decided that I would support the work of our field from a temporary location, while waiting for the visa paperwork to come through.

In the midst of this unexpected development and stay in a temporary location, I remember feeling hopeful after the initial feelings of confusion had subsided. It was Advent, and the waiting and expectation of the season resonated with my own journey and with what our local friends were going through. *God* used the reminder that nothing is impossible with him (Luke 1:37) and that he is faithful to his promises, to grow hope and expectation in my heart for what he would do among our peoples. The deep meaning of hope came to life for me. Hope doesn't grow in easy places. In Scripture, we often read about hope in the context of persevering in difficult times. Hope is a fruit that the Spirit grows in us when we trust in him.

Not long after Christmas, however, my hope-filled heart was tested when I received the news that pursuing a study visa was no longer an option. Once again, a change of plans and a longer period of waiting. Instead of applying for a study visa, I began to explore work visa options. It became a daily “work out exercise” to keep my eyes fixed on *God* for whom nothing is impossible.

To paraphrase Rick Warren, trust is like a muscle: you have to use it, to

exercise it, in order for it to become stronger.³ I was learning to walk with *God* when I could not see beyond the next few weeks, not knowing what would happen and where I would be.

One online dictionary defines trust as a “firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something.”⁴ It describes quite well how *God* became bigger for me as I was learning to “exercise” trust. I discovered how reliable he is. Even though my questions were not answered, his presence in the situation was real and I had his promises to hold on to. I discovered how powerful he is; his thoughts are higher and often different from my own, but so much more beautiful and better. I learned that trust did not just “happen”; it was a daily choice I had to make to fully surrender and rest in his reliability, truth, and ability.

Despite the unexpected twists and turns, we believed that *God* was encouraging me to keep pursuing the vision. However, I also believe it was not just the vision or a next placement that mattered to *God*. The ongoing uncertainty, the persevering, the “hanging in there” was taking its toll. There have been times when I lost joy and felt emotionally exhausted. I had to learn to be honest with myself and with *God*, and to be honest with those around me as well. I had to learn not to pretend I was able to “take it in my stride.” When I admitted to myself, to *God*, and to others that I was not doing so well, I opened up and was able to receive *God's* love and the care of people. This is what kept me going.

And there was still quite a way to go.

The process of finding a suitable work visa took longer than expected, but we were delighted when the pieces of the puzzle eventually seemed to come



together. This excitement, however, was followed by another seven months in my home country. Processing the work visa paperwork took much longer than anyone expected. At times, we were not even sure it would come through at all.

When I finally had the work visa in my passport, we celebrated. The long journey seemed to have come to an end. I would fly to my new ministry location after our annual field conference elsewhere in Asia.

That was January 2020.

I never got to fly to my new ministry location. The COVID pandemic meant that after our annual conference, I flew back to my home country instead. It was very confusing. And it was difficult to face the fact that the uncertainty I had lived with for so long, would last even longer. I even experienced feelings of embarrassment and shame about having to go back to my home country again.

In the next few months, deliberately engaging in worship became the means to remind myself of the truth of God's faithfulness. I needed this, especially when it became increasingly clear in autumn 2020 that the door to my new ministry location was closed and would stay closed. Out of all the setbacks and unexpected developments, this was probably the hardest one for me. I felt confused. I no longer felt sure I had understood God's guidance correctly. It took truth from God's word, prayer, and conversations with leadership and friends to help me regain perspective, to help me realise that all these closed doors did not necessarily mean we had misunderstood God's guidance.

I have come to accept closed doors as part of the journey God has taken me on. I don't necessarily have answers to all my questions. But that is ok. If anything, I have begun to embrace my identity as a pilgrim. My heart resonates with the truth that knowing God's will is a daily walk with him, a journey, not reaching a destination.

In the process, God has taught me so much about himself, about myself, and



about different aspects of ministry to our people through the various tasks and roles I got involved in along the way. The journey has shaped me in ways I could never have imagined. These are all lessons I take with me as I embark on the next stage of my journey, in which I will serve in a leadership role.

It still moves me when I read Hebrews 11:13–16:

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

No matter how much I love stability and the ability to make plans (that work out), God has his own way of doing things and he has often a different route in mind than I have. It is so encouraging to know that God is not ashamed of those who may feel like they are

“wandering,” that “wandering” can even be part of our calling as a follower of Jesus. As Warren Wiersbe says:

expect to be led occasionally on paths that may seem unnecessarily long and circuitous. Remind yourself that He knows what He's doing; He isn't in a hurry and as long as you follow Him, you're safe and in the place of His blessing.⁵

The passage in Hebrews 11 is also a beautiful picture of how the vision of heaven (verse 16) results in movement, in a journey. Longing for heaven, looking forward to standing before God's throne together with multitudes of people from all over the world, should influence how we live here and now. Hebrews 11 encourages me to welcome the promise, to embrace that vision, to be that nomad, so to speak. It also encourages me to just be available for how God wants to involve me, even during times of waiting. **MRT**

¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

² Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2019), Kindle ed.

³ Pastor Rick Warren, “Your faith is like a muscle. A muscle can't be strengthened unless it's tested, stretched, and put under pressure. You don't develop strong muscles by doing nothing! You develop strong muscles by stretching them, testing them, and pushing them to the limit.” Facebook, 2 July 2020, https://m.facebook.com/pastorrickwarren/photos/a.414149010902/10158553496505903/?type=3&comment_id=10158554962185903 (accessed 11 April 2022).

⁴ Lexico, s.v. “trust,” <https://www.lexico.com/definition/trust> (accessed 11 April 2022).

⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2018), 106.

Hope doesn't grow in easy places. In Scripture, we often read about hope in the context of persevering in difficult times.

An Interview with Walter DeMoss and J H about The Modular Study Group: An Answer to One Part of the Problem of Missionary Retention

Walter DeMoss



Walter DeMoss was raised in Togo and Ghana till the age of thirteen by missionary parents and became a Christian at eighteen. He worked as an engineer for nine years and has a Masters from Moody Bible Institute. He has been serving in East Asia, initially teaching at an international school in Thailand for missionary children and later opened MSG schools in different locations. He is married to Mirjam and they have three children.

J H

J H has served in Asia in the areas of medical and TCK education for more than 10 years. Since 2017, he has directed an MSG.

What is a Modular Study Group and who is it used for?

The Modular Study Group (MSG) is a hybrid school model that seeks to provide high quality academics, discipleship, and support for families living among the least and last reached peoples on earth. In this form of education, students travel from their various cities or villages to a central location where they study for one week a month over a nine-month school year. For the remaining three weeks a month, they work from home to complete assessments relating to their current module of study and further assignments relating to the next week together. The program runs from 7th grade (12–13 years old) to 12th grade (17–19 years old). Students matriculating from the MSG should be ready to begin a university or college program or enter the workforce.

How and why did you decide to form an MSG?

The idea of the MSG came as a direct result of seeing the school magnet effect and its devastating impact on missionary work in various hard-to-live places. Building a large, well-resourced missionary school acts as a magnet that attracts missionaries to work near its location and unintentionally deprives many countries and people groups of long-term workers. The perceived need for an accredited education and the fall in popularity of boarding have significantly changed the way we view

missions work and families. To many with a family, the possibility of long-term work in a remote area seemed to be impossible. The demands and expectations of education would eventually remove workers from the field. Challenging this reality, the MSG lightens the educational burden so that missionary families can thrive and remain where they are called to serve.

In our desire to see missionaries serving where they are called to serve, we distinguish between being “on the field” and “in the field”. The former refers to any worker who serves cross-culturally, while the latter refers to those who are unhindered from living among the people they are called to serve. We thus consider a family that lives in Bangkok, Thailand but works among a tribal group that mainly lives in a different country to be “on the field” but not “in the field”. The goal of an MSG is to free as many missionary families to be “in the field” as possible and not just “on the field”. That being said, the MSG is a practical model of education not intended to supersede other models. Rather, it provides help for missionary families whose needs are not met by traditional models or online education.

What challenges did you face to get an MSG going and to keep it going?

There have been two major challenges along the way. One has been trying

Building a large, well-resourced missionary school acts as a magnet that attracts missionaries to work near its location and unintentionally deprives many countries and people groups of long-term workers.

The Modular Study Group lightens the educational burden so that missionary families can thrive and remain where they are called to serve.

to explain to the various stakeholders what an MSG is and what it is not. The bigger and more consistent challenge is staffing. To keep this educational method going, about one long-term teacher is needed for every four long-term missionary families. Without enough teachers, the “real” missionary work will not continue effectively as families face decisions that often lead to relocating and/or leaving the field altogether. Agencies may be aware of this on a theoretical level but the practical truth is that, for many agencies, teacher recruitment remains a passive effort at best. Without a sufficient bank of teachers to keep parents with children in place, mission can become very inefficient and piecemeal.

Who benefits from an MSG and in what way?

As mentioned above, the MSG exists to keep missionaries “in” and not just “on” the field. It is our long-term hope that this model will propel more people towards incarnational ministry among the unreached people groups of the world. We believe that the benefits extend to the people groups, the students who study under this model, and their parents. Parents are relieved of the tension of wondering how to educate their children and remain in service, and students are given a tremendous opportunity to take personal responsibility, mature, and move forward in their journey as disciples of Christ. The social benefits experienced by the children are probably the biggest appeal for them. Many students who attend the MSG come from areas where they are the only non-nationals. Coming to “camp” with one’s friends nine weeks a year, even if it is framed as a school, is all the motivation they need to work hard the other weeks.

Do you need a minimum number of students to get going?

We generally recommend that an MSG needs a minimum of ten students whose parents are committed to keep it going

for two years to get started. It takes that number of students to generate a strong community feel and it takes that much time to establish credibility among the missionary community where the school is running. That being said, one MSG started with only five students in year one, and grew to thirteen students in year two. The important question to address is how many students are needed to create a viable community of learners.

Do you need to choose a particular curriculum before starting an MSG?

Each MSG site has the freedom to choose its own curriculum, but is encouraged to use well-established and time-honored options. This is both for the efficiency of obtaining resources and to allow for different MSG sites to work together more effectively. From Europe to Australasia to Canada, the curriculum requirements vary greatly, so it is important to select one that will be acceptable at the public school level in a particular country. Since the MSG is not accredited and we have no plans to work towards accreditation, we have a much greater freedom in choosing our curriculum. Even so, whatever curriculum is

selected, it needs to be accessible, flexible, and practical, taking the needs of the members into account. That said, families who have very specific requirements will probably not be well served by the MSG. Families who want a well-rounded education with plenty of opportunity for personal growth and discipleship may find that there are not many programs better suited to this than the MSG. We believe that the MSG, regardless of the particular curriculum chosen, will prepare students for university and life. Even so, since university entrance requirements vary so much, we cannot guarantee that the MSG will be able to fulfil them all. We leave that responsibility to be worked out by the parents.

Where would an MSG work best and least?

The MSG works best in a country where there is a central hub city that can be traveled to and from in just one leg. Travel must be accessible, relatively safe, and affordable. A school serving as an MSG hub also needs to be established near to a core group of parents who would like to serve in more remote areas. If a local international school or one with boarding is available, we recommend that parents pursue that option for their children. We have also found that an MSG will likely fail in its vision if it is only seen as the “cheap” local option. The one week on and three weeks at home system can prove difficult for students



living in the hub city. The MSG and its community work best when the majority of the students are coming from remote parts of the host country.

What are the long term plans of the MSG?

We intend to continue planting MSGs in countries where the need exists. Currently, we are working on starting such schools in Pakistan and India. Plans are in place to establish schools in Cambodia and Myanmar as well.

Though the first MSGs were all started in Asia, the model could prove useful in Africa and South America or wherever there is a need and the Lord provides staff so that a new school can be planted. It must be remembered that the MSG is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a means to free people to obey the Great Commission by making disciples among difficult-to-reach people. As long as missionaries are obedient to the call to incarnational ministry, the MSG will continue to be a practical means to help them do just that.

Where could someone go if they wanted to learn more about the MSG education model?

You can visit the main website at www.msgeducation.com or send an email to admin@msgeducation.com. If you are interested in visiting an MSG in person, you can contact us to set up a time to see the program in operation. We have several video resources available that give further insight into the MSG and its needs. **MRT**

Resources on Missionary Retention

Books

- Brenda Bosch, *Thriving in Difficult Places: Member Care for Yourself and Others*, 3 vol. (n.p.: Brenda Bosch, 2014).
- Joyce M. Bowers, ed., *Raising Resilient MKs: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers* (Colorado Springs: ACSI, 1998).
- Hamilton T. Burke, *Effective Kingdom Service in Hostile Places: Advanced Training and Support for International Workers and the Organizations that Send Them*, 3 vol. (n.p.: Todd H. Burdick, 2020).
- Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Connections: Stepping Out and Fitting in Around the World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002).
- John Fawcett, ed., *Stress and Trauma Handbook: Strategies for Flourishing in Demanding Environments* (Monrovia, CA: World Vision International, 2003).
- Robert W. Ferris, *Establishing Ministry Training: A Manual for Program Developers* (Pasadena: William Carey, 1995).
- Marilyn Gardner, *Between Worlds: Essays on Culture and Belonging* (n.p.: Doorlight, 2014).
- Rod and Ruthie Gilbert, *PACT to Go!: A Cross-cultural Worker's Guide to Creating a Personal Accountability and Care Team*, Revised (Niceville, FL: Elemental, 2020).
- C. David Harley, *Preparing to Serve: Training for Cross-Cultural Mission* (Pasadena: William Carey, 1995).
- Rob Hay, et al., eds., *Worth Keeping: Global Perspectives on Good Practice in Missionary Retention* (Pasadena: William Carey, 2006).
- Ronald L. Koteskey, *Before You Get "Home": Preparing for Reentry* (Wilmore, KY: Ronald L. Koteskey, 2008).
- Ronald L. Koteskey, *What Missionaries Ought to Know...: A Handbook for Life and Service* (Wilmore, KY: Ronald L. Koteskey, 2003, revised 2017).
- Ronald and Bonnie Koteskey, *Coming "Home": The Reentry Transition* (Wilmore, KY: Ronald L. Koteskey, 2003).
- Marguerite Kraft, ed., *Frontline Women: Negotiating Cross-cultural Issues in Ministry* (Pasadena: William Carey, 2003).
- Kelly O'Donnell, *Doing Member Care Well:*

- Perspectives and Practices from Around the World* (Pasadena: William Carey, 2002).
- Robin Pascoe, *Raising Global Nomads: Parenting in an On-Demand World* (Vancouver: Expatriate, 2006).
- Marina Prins and Braam Willemse, *Member Care for Missionaries: A Practical Guide for Senders* (Strand, South Africa: Member Care Southern Africa, 2002).
- William D. Taylor, ed., *Too Valuable to Lose: Exploring the Causes and Cures of Missionary Attrition* (Pasadena: William Carey, 1997).
- WEA Mission Commission, "ReMAP II—Long-term Retention of Missionary Personnel," *Connections* 3, no. 2 (June 2004), https://weamc.global/archive/Vol03No2_ReMAPII.pdf.
- Amy Young, *Looming Transitions: Starting and Finishing Well in Cross-Cultural Service* (n.p.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).

Articles

- Detlef Bloecher, "Good Agency Practices: Lessons from ReMAP II," *EMQ* 41 no. 2 (2005): 227–37.
- Ron Brown, "Preparing for the Realities of Missions in a Changing World," *EMQ* 42, no. 4 (October 2006): 488–92.
- Hsiu-Ching Ko and Mu-Li Yang, "The Effects of Cross-Cultural Training on Expatriate Assignments," *Intercultural Communication Studies* 20, no. 1 (2011): 158–74.
- Lisa N. Littrell, Eduardo Salas, Kathleen P. Hess, Michael Paley, and Sharon Riedel, "Expatriate Preparation: A Critical Analysis of 25 Years of Cross-Cultural Training Research," *Human Resource Development Review* 5, no. 3 (2006): 355–88.
- James Nelson, "Excellence in Missions: Four Ways to Improve Field Staff Retention," *EMQ* 51, no. 4 (October 2015): 440–45.
- B. Van Ochs, "Ten Challenges that May Make Going Home Look Attractive," *EMQ* 37, no. 4 (October 2001): 466–71.
- Deseree Whittle, "Missionary Attrition: Its Relationship to the Spiritual Dynamics of the Late Twentieth Century," *CJET* (June 1999): 68–83.

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- Margaretha Adiwardana, "Training Missionaries to Persevere: Wholistic Preparation for Situations of Adversity" (MTh thesis, Discipleship Training Centre, Singapore, 1999).
- Robert Brynjolfson, "Maximizing Informal Learning in an Intentional Missionary Training Community" (DMin thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2006).
- Janet Dallman, "Factors Affecting Attrition and Retention in Japan" (MA thesis, Redcliffe College, 2019).
- Beverlea Parkhill, "Self-Care for Single Mission Workers within OMF International (UK): The Challenges and Opportunities" (MA thesis, Redcliffe College, 2018).
- Joyce Reed, "Wayfinding: Spiritual Resilience for Global Servants" (DMin thesis, George Fox University, 2021), <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/413/>.

Blogs

- David Baldwin, "Less is not More: Theological Education and Missionary Attrition," News and Blog, Oak Hill College (3 February 2021), <https://www.oakhill.ac.uk/resources/news-and-blog/post/54-less-is-not-more-theological-education-and-mission-attrition/>.
- David Selvey, "The Truth of Missionary Attrition," *Faith Global Mission Blog* (24 October 2015), <https://blogs.faithlafayette.org/missions/the-cost-of-missionary-attrition/>.
- Craig Thompson, "Why do Missionaries Leave the Field? It's Hard to Say," *Clearing Customs* blog (29 November 2014), <https://clearingcustoms.net/2014/11/29/why-do-missionaries-leave-the-field-its-hard-to-say/>.

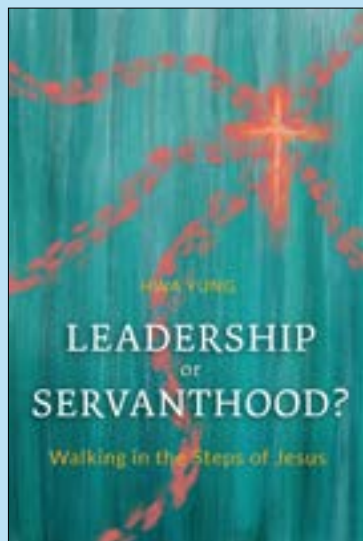
Some of the books along with others can be downloaded in various formats from <https://www.missionarycare.com/e-books> and <https://passionexchange.wordpress.com/missions-resources/>.

Leadership or Servanthood?

Walking in the Steps of Jesus

Hwa Yung. Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2021. ISBN: 978-1-83973-576-9. 166pp.

Reviewed by Walter McConnell



We live in a world that is awash with books promoting Christian perspectives on leadership and may sometimes feel we are swimming in offers to sit under a famous leadership guru and take another course on how to be a better Christian leader. And while these books and courses may offer insights into developing our leadership style or potential or focus, on closer examination many of the promised “leadership laws,” “gospel principles,” and “biblical directions” share more in common with secular business theories than scriptural teaching. Don’t get me wrong—good ideas are not intrinsically bad simply because they are “secular”. We should embrace good leadership advice given by the likes of Henry Ford, Akio Morita, Steven Jobs, and others and acknowledge their source. The problem I have with some “Christian” leadership material is that it isn’t Christian enough. Despite claims that the principles articulated are Bible-based, a rigorous study of the texts cited often reveals that the purported ideas could not have originated with the biblical authors. Indeed, they may have more in common with Drucker, Covey, and Sun Tze than with Moses, Daniel, and Paul. Again, the issue isn’t that Christians shouldn’t learn from the business world. Rather, it’s that we shouldn’t try to re-clothe modern business concepts to make them appear to have been comfortable to Jews wearing tunics and sandals long before they were developed by Wall Street bankers wearing suits, ties, and lizard skin oxfords.

The contrast between many books on leadership and Hwa Yung’s *Leadership or*

Servanthood? couldn’t be more obvious. From the start, he informs us that, despite the appearance of the word in the title, the book says little about leadership as such. Rather, “The central emphasis ... is that the call to discipleship and ministry is first and foremost a call to be a servant of Christ and the church, and not to leadership.” While recognizing that the church needs leaders, Hwa Yung believes true spiritual leadership only comes when we, like Jesus, “have learned genuine servanthood and submission” to the Father (xiii). He then develops a number of ways the Bible declares the need for Christians to learn and practice submission.

Chapter 1 identifies “The Call to Servanthood” as a primary Christian calling. This is exemplified by Jesus, his apostles, and the regular use of the NT terms *diakonos/diakoneō* (servant/to wait on tables) and *doulos/douleō* (slave/to serve) for ministry in the church. Chapter 2, “Servanthood and the Contemporary Church,” discusses some contemporary leadership models, rejects the model of pastor as CEO, and urges us to seek opportunities for humble service rather than promotion to higher offices.

“Whence Spiritual Authority?” is the question that drives chapter 3. Do we pursue the hard power of international politics, cling onto institutional authority sourced in an organization or denomination, or exude the spiritual authority modeled by Jesus as he submitted to his Father and was empowered by the Holy Spirit? Chapter 4 reminds us to seek “Submission as the Path to Authority.” This paradoxical concept echoes through the Bible as submission and servanthood are united as the only grounds for true authority.

Chapters 5 and 6, “You are My Beloved Child” and “Living in the Security of Our Father’s Love,” turn us to the Father of Jesus, who becomes our Father when we are born again, experience adoption, and cry out “Abba, Father.” As we focus on him and his love, our desire for preeminence is put in its place along with our brokenness, insecurity, and inner wounds. The core of chapter 7 outlines some thoughts from Paul’s departing words to the Ephesian church elders (Acts 20:18–35) that contrast with many modern leadership goals. We should (1) serve the Lord with humility, (2) be compassionate, (3) be faithful in ministry, (4) live a life of sacrifice, and (5) reject self-seeking ambition.

Chapter 8 traces “The Father’s Transforming Process” through the lives of four biblical characters—Jacob, Moses, Peter, and Paul—to show how we need him to do the same for us. The final chapter brings us back to a

discussion on “Servants and Leaders,” again insisting that “the call to ministry is first and foremost to be servants of Christ in his church” (127). Questions about leadership should be subsumed under this head with a reminder that the bottom line is spiritual authority gained by submitting to the Father.

This book bears close examination by anyone in church leadership or training toward that end, as it gives biblical directions that are missing from much modern teaching on leadership. Everyone involved in leadership training should be required to read it, seriously reflect upon its message, and consider how its focus should impact their philosophy and practice of leadership training.

Though I highly recommend the book, I do not find everything convincing. For instance, while I agree that Christians should strive to be servants more than leaders, I find it overly optimistic to say that “By living and ministering as servants, our loving and humble service will impact those around us as great leadership” (14). While that may be true for some people in some situations, many of us will never be recognized as leaders no matter what we do. While we may receive eternal honor from God, we may be ignored or forgotten by those around us. Similarly, the casual rejection of the “servant-leader” model may overlook the fact that several different servant-leader models exist, some of which may be more commendable than others.

A final insight from this book that all Christian leaders should regularly repeat comes in “The Servant’s Prayer,” adapted from the Wesleyan Watch Night “Covenant Service” (xvii). May we all, in the words of this prayer, find our role as leader or not by submitting ourselves to the will of God.

A Servant’s Prayer

I am no longer my own, but yours.
Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;
Put me to doing, put me to suffering;
Let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,
Exalted for you, or brought low for you;
Let me be full,
Let me be empty,
Let me have all things,
Let me have nothing;
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
To your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
You are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And may the covenant now made on earth, be
ratified in heaven. Amen.

Many thanks to Langham Literature for the complimentary copy.