CHARACTER TRUMPS EVERYTHING

Posted on August 4, 2021 by Eddie

When recruiting people for mission work, it is tempting to focus on technical skills and ability. Does the person have some experience in language learning? Do they have the professional skills required for the job they are doing? These are all important, but above everything else we need to focus on whether or not they are growing disciples of Jesus Christ. That's the bottom line.
Category: Observations

I saw a couple of Twitter conversations yesterday which set me thinking.

https://twitter.com/kouya/status/1422444650770673676?s=20

https://twitter.com/paul_bailie/status/1422649814907502600?s=20

As you can see from my reply in the first thread, I believe that learning a language and culture are absolutely key to any cross-cultural mission worker's ministry. Learning a language does not simply allow you to communicate with people, it also shows that you value them and - most importantly - it models Jesus who reaches out to us with the offer of salvation, rather than asking us to ascend to heaven to meet him.

However, the second thread got me thinking. I remember a few people in Africa - generally short term mission workers - who completely mangled the French language (if they spoke it at all), but who managed to build real and deep with relationships with the people around them. They were generous with the people they met, they took an interest in them - even if communication involved lots of gestures or finding a translator - and they had time for everyone. Quite frankly, they were better at relating to people than I was, despite the fact that my French and my knowledge of local culture outstripped theirs by a long way. I'm just not that nice!

I would still maintain that language and culture learning are incredibly important, but in mission work, character, trumps everything else. You can be technically proficient, highly educated and yet still be a pain in the anatomy. The Bible describes character in a number of different ways; holiness and the fruit of the Spirit being the most obvious ways. Without these things, not only can you not please God, you can't be an effective missionary, either.

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