MISSIONARY CALL: THE DEFINITIVE POST

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Category: Short-Term Mission

Over the years, I've written a number of posts on the subject of the "missionary call". This post started life asÂ an article for Global Connections' excellent magazine iServe and sums up my thoughts on the question.

Letâ€™s start with the things that we can be certain about.

If you are a Christian you are called to take up your cross and to follow Jesus; loving God with all your heart and soul and strength and loving your neighbour as yourself.

You are also called to play an active part in the life of the Church. You are a part of the body and the body needs you and you need the body.

Thirdly, you are called to be part of a disciple making movement wherever you find yourself; at home or on the other side of the globe. You might be directly involved in witnessing to people or you may be supporting those on the front line, but you are called to be involved.

It doesnâ€™t matter who you are, what stage of life you are at; you are called to do these things and if you are doing them, you know you are on the right track in your walk with God. To be honest, it doesnâ€™t really matter whether you do these things in Kewsick or in Kazahkstan. The important thing is that you are being faithful to Christ in these basic ways; everything else is just details.

Of course, this doesnâ€™t help if what you are really wondering about is whether God has called you to spend the next two years working with young people in Burkina Faso.

Actually, thatâ€™s not quite true, the answers to questions about our specific calling lie in the realities of our day-to-day discipleship. Letâ€™s take each of the three areas I mentioned above in turn.

The Call to Follow Jesus

Jesus makes pretty radical demands on our lives. When he tells us to take up our cross to follow him, he is basically saying that we need to be prepared to give up everything in his service. We have to put him first, others second, and ourselves last.

This means that we have to be prepared to ask some pretty searching questions about our motivation when we start thinking about missionary service. Be honest with yourself, is your motive to really follow Jesus wherever he leads, or do you think that spending a couple of years in Africa might be cool, a good experience. Who is it all about; Jesus or you?

Donâ€™t get me wrong, I think that travelling and visiting new places is great. Iâ€™m all in favour of people exploring the world and experiencing other cultures. If this is what you really want to do, be honest with yourself, save some money and take a gap year. There is nothing wrong with doing that at all. However, it isnâ€™t appropriate to put a Christian gloss on things and to ask your friends and

your church to support you, if what you are really after is a fantastic holiday.

Of course, understanding our own motivations is always difficult. It may well be Jesus who is calling you to follow him to East Africa, but this doesnâ€™t stop you hoping that you will see lions and cheetahs in the wild. New experiences, new friends and exotic locations are part of mission life and they are there to be enjoyed. But they should never be our motivation.

Talk this through with some good friends who know you well, pray about it and if you are convinced that Jesus is calling you to serve him, move on to the next step.

The Call To Be Part of the Church

If you are going to be involved in some sort of mission work, you will need the backing of your church. You will need people to pray for you, to support you financially, to send you the odd bar of chocolate and to encourage you when things get tough; the best people to do this are your church family. This means that you need to share your vision for mission work with them as soon as possible.

The idea of talking to your Vicar, Pastor or missionary committee about your future can be quite scary, but put yourself in their shoes. They are involved in church because they want to see people grow in their faith and to follow Jesus. People like you who are prepared to follow the Lord, whatever it takes, are why they do the work they do. They might have practical concerns about whether the church budget can stretch to supporting you and who could replace you leading the youth group, but nothing excites a church leader more than seeing people wanting to follow Jesus. Go and make their day!

Of course, there is always the frightening thought that your church will say that they donâ€™t think this is the right step for you. This can be really discouraging, but you need to unpack what the church is saying and why it is saying it.

If the issues are practical, say, they canâ€™t afford to support you this financial year then there may be a work around, especially if you have friends, family or contacts in other churches. Be polite, but be persistent and creative.

However, they might also say that they donâ€™t feel that you are ready for the particular sort of mission you are considering. Itâ€™s really hard to hear this, but you have to take this seriously. There are lots of mission stories about famous people who did great things for God against the advice of their church leadership, but there are far more people who crashed and burned â€“ they just never made it into the books. Be patient; no reputable mission group would take you one anyway if your church feels itâ€™s not the right time.

When Paul was converted, he received a call from God to take the message of Jesus to the Gentiles, but he didnâ€™t get on the first ship to Rome. He buried himself in the life of his local church, made

contacts and friendships with lots of Christians. Then one day, the Holy Spirit told the Church to set Paul and Barnabas aside for mission work.

Just because you arenâ€™t ready now, doesnâ€™t mean that you wonâ€™t be ready soon and this takes us to our last calling.

The Call To Make Disciples Wherever You Are

The most important thing you can do if you feel you have a call to mission is to get stuck into something here and now. Get involved in your church and start to serve others.

There are a number of reasons why this is important.

Firstly, involvement in your local church demonstrates the reality of your call. Letâ€™s be honest, if you say that you have a call to be a missionary, but you never turn up at your churchâ€™s mission prayer meeting, people have a right to ask a few questions! If you are involved in the church, supporting others, praying and serving, then people are more likely to get a vision for you working cross-culturally and will be prepared to support you.

As you get involved in church life, you can start to learn some of the skills that you will need in mission work. Itâ€™s no use thinking that you can teach a Sunday-School class in Thailand, if you have never taught one in your own church. You do not suddenly become a super leader or evangelist just by getting on a plane at Heathrow. Your church is the place where you can learn some of the skills you need.

So, are you called to mission work? I donâ€™t know. What I do know is that you are called to be faithful here and now as part of your church family. As you work through the implications of this, you can also start to look to the future.

iServe (previously Mission Matters) is a new publication designed to help people understand the breadth of opportunities available to serve God both here in the UK and overseas. Be inspired as you read about what is happening around the world, maybe find yourself challenged to consider your response. As well as articles and testimonies you will find information on most of the key Christian agencies.Â
iServe is an excellent resource, not only for those wanting to actively engage in mission and be informed about opportunities available, but the stories from around the world can inspire about how God is using ordinary people to fulfill his global purposes. The resource is available free for churches â€“ a great handout for any mission-focused event.