

Missions: A Creative Approach

By Fr. Archer Torrey

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Dear Father Torrey,

I hear that you have been "on furlough" in America. I also hear that you have spent so much time visiting Korean churches all over the USA that you have had no time to rest! One of my friends wrote that you were in his area, but the pastor would not let him see you! I suppose there was a reason...

Actually, what I am writing about is something I saw in a bulletin from the US Center for World Mission. I suppose I could write to them directly about it, but I thought you might like to share it with the *Shinangye* family. What I read was this: "Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) reports that, for the first time, more than half of their new recruits are Asian."

Father Torrey, if one of us wants to offer himself to be a missionary, does he have to take a full theological course? Is there any way we can test our vocation before we commit ourselves to such a long and difficult training program? Are there jobs on the mission field for people other than preachers and doctors and high-powered educators?

Sincerely yours,
Yoon Jin-chol

Dear Brother Yoon:

Thank you for your letter concerning requirements for the mission field. But first, I want to apologize to your friend who was unable to contact me. I really hate to be "unavailable," but it is a fact that my strength is limited. At most of the churches where I have taken meetings, just preparing for and delivering the addresses has taken all my time and strength. It does not matter how many times I may have lectured on a given subject, if I fail to spend adequate time in prayer, God may not use me at all. Of course, I know if he would use me without my spending time in prayer, I would get spiritually careless, and also proud — thinking it was I who was delivering his message, and not him.

In some cases, I have had a relatively light lecture program, but there have been other meetings with individuals or special groups (such as clergy groups) that were not publicized. I have almost never had any time to spare. So please ask your friend to forgive me and to forgive the pastor in whose church I was speaking. My time really was booked solid twenty-four hours a day! The only way I could have worked in personal interviews would have been to do without sleep. I thank God for good health, but I do have to be careful.

Now, to your question. I want to assure you that there are all kinds of openings for all kinds of people. We need many workers besides the limited “missionary types” (probably church planters, doctors and teachers) who are referred to as “missionaries” in Korea. Opportunities abound – radio broadcasting, print shops, aviation, community development, building, teaching Biblical parenting skills. The list is endless.

We are just beginning to realize that God has far more imagination than any missionary society. He also has more different jobs to do on the mission field than any of us has ever guessed. If you think God has called you to missionary work – either for a few months or for life – you are probably right. But, surprisingly, it could be in a capacity and with a type of training totally different from any of the traditional “missionary” prerequisites. The job that God has for you may not necessarily require studying theology at all. There are many other kinds of skills that can be used in areas never before considered.

As an example, such groups as Operation Mobilization, Youth with a Mission, *Yesu Chun Do Dan*, and the Antioch Project will arrange for you to get a good taste of the mission field with only a few weeks’ briefing. They are doing a tremendously valuable piece of work in many different places, using people for short-term ministry to their own language groups. This is one of the best ways to test your vocation. The Antioch Project is looking for people like your friend in the USA, Koreans who also speak English. They realize that God has sent all these Korean immigrants to the USA to train them to be, like the church of Antioch in Bible times, a source of missionaries. God wants to use them to reach both America and the tremendous English-speaking world, reaching out eventually to every corner of the globe.

Even if you know that God wants you to be a missionary for the rest of your life, short-term experience is still worthwhile. With this short introduction, you will know first hand what you are training for. I would guess that most people who go to theological colleges have an inadequate concept of what God might be wanting them to do. If one has never been out of his own country, or very far from his home town, he is bound to have a limited concept of the “ministry.” The very word [used in Korean for] “minister” (*sa yok ja*, worker) is an incorrect translation! In the Bible, in the original language, what we call a *sa yok ja* is actually a *somginun saram* (person who serves.) That is what the English word “minister” originally meant. It is we missionaries from the imperialistic West that have given the impression that a *sun gyo sa* (missionary) or a *sa yok ja* is some kind of big, important person with all kinds of technical training and ecclesiastical authority! There is no such concept in the Bible. Anyone who has such an idea ingrained in his mind or behavior does not understand what the Bible means by the word “minister.”

Jesus disciples were mostly working men with very little formal education. Their training consisted of walking around the country with Jesus for three years, listening to him talk to very ordinary people in very simple language, and in watching him perform miracles.

Just before he left the earth, he gave his disciples two tasks: one was for them to be witnesses, and one was to do mighty works. Neither of these tasks required any special education. A witness is just someone who tells someone else what he has seen, heard or experienced. Further, a witness is not believed when he is the only one. The law of the Bible is this – “in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall everything be confirmed.” Most people instinctively feel

that way: "I am not going to take just your word for it. Is there anyone else who was there? I want to know what they saw." This is why Jesus always sent his disciples out by twos and threes, and this is why the early church continued to do the same. The task of witnessing is the most basic task of the church and of the missionary. This is done, not by specialists, but by teams of ordinary people, who are witnesses first, and only later teachers.

Now, when these teams of witnesses reach out to people groups whose languages are different from their own, they have a problem. Either they must find interpreters or they must study that language. This is where the missionary task of the church gets complicated. However, the youth missions I mentioned above are able to accomplish a lot through interpreters, giving the young people a chance to decide which language group they have been called to work with. There will be many factors involved in the decision—the culture-level, the presence or absence of an indigenous church, the type of native religion, the government's attitude toward missions, the logistics of moving to that country, finding a way to make a living and establish a residence, and many other situations.

If the missionary's home church wants to accept the responsibility for supporting him, he still has the problem of explaining to the local people why he is there. If he wants to start a school or a hospital he may find himself welcomed, but he may also find his time so taken up with organizing and administering, that he has very little time to just spend with the people on a person-to-person level. If he has to learn a new language, of course, that will be time-consuming, but it can also provide a wonderful way to get to know the people and their culture.

One of the most exciting areas of work today is literacy evangelism. Tremendous numbers of illiterate people all over the world are deeply grateful to anyone who can teach them to read. Literacy work is not only highly satisfying because of the people's keen appreciation, it is very creative. Very often one has to invent or improvise a program for teaching literacy. If the language has been in writing for a long time, the illiterates will be a class who have been despised by the educated and sophisticated. That means that the missionary will be working with the poorest people in society. What could be more like Jesus' own mission: "I have come to proclaim good news to the poor?" Let me warn you, though. If you have good news for the poor, you may not be popular among the rich and powerful, whose status depends upon exploiting the illiterate poor. You may receive the same reception, after a while, that Jesus received from the Sadducees and Pharisees. A cross may be waiting for you at the end of the road...

Another phase of missionary work both adventurous and tough, though tremendously rewarding, is the field of Bible translation. It is estimated there are still as many languages which have not been put into writing (and therefore, do not have Bibles,) as there are languages into which the Bible has already been translated. Large numbers are in the jungle areas of the world, around the great tropical belt, just north and south of the equator. These people groups have never had a system of writing. The missionary not only risks suspicion and hostility as a stranger, but mosquitoes, prickly heat, and tropical diseases.

You will be interested to know that many Christians who offer themselves for this kind of work are people who have grown up in modern comfort and know that "modern civilization" is not

what it is cracked up to be. Rather, it is soft, self-indulgent and corrupt, opposed to the preaching of good news to the poor.

Now that Korea has been “modernized,” we are no longer being fooled by the shiny exterior of “civilization.” At last we may be ready to use our skills to take good news to all the world, including those very smart but very suspicious people who have lived for thousands of years without reading and writing, who know there is a God, but do not know how to meet him or how to read his word. Any takers?

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Dae Chun-dok