

How To Select A Mission Field

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Resources Newsletter, Winter 2004

Talk to missionaries or sponsoring churches about how they selected the mission field where they now work, and you will hear a wide range of answers.

Some chose their mission field because they were stationed in the region while in the military. Others work where they do because some good friends invited them to join a team or because they heard of a few newborn Christians who had no one to teach them. Still others chose their field because they fell in love with it while on an overseas study program or because a social studies teacher in grade school once piqued their interest in the place where they now serve.

I have learned to bite my tongue when I disagree with the choices missionaries and churches make when selecting a field of work. Since I believe the biblical teaching that God opens and closes doors (Col. 4:3; Rev. 3:8) and that he moves people's hearts to do jobs that need to be done (Neh. 2:12; 7:5), I am uneasy about questioning choices people make concerning where they plan to work.

We do need to be thoughtful, however, when we select a mission field. First, we should ask the Father for wisdom as we choose the place where we will invest time, talent, energy, money and lives. God is acquainted with every place on earth. We need his guidance.

Second, we must examine our rationale for choosing one mission field over another. Although we may be charmed by a particular geographical location, our fascination with the place may not be a sufficiently good reason to select it as the spot where we give our lives or where we encourage sending churches to invest hundreds of thousands (perhaps millions) of dollars.

Generally speaking, we do well to ask at least three questions when we are choosing a mission field:

1. *Is this field receptive?* Both receptive and non-receptive mission fields need workers, but "fields that are white unto harvest" deserve a higher priority. Like farmers, missionaries should make sure they gather ripe crops before the "bad weather" comes and ruins the harvest.
2. *Is this field strategic?* Some places are more influential than others. They have special importance because they are centers of learning, mass media, entertainment, sports, culture, politics, commerce and industry. Planting a vibrant church in this kind of setting will usually produce more far-reaching results than doing evangelism in an area that is in decline.
3. *Is it mainly unreached?* Parts of the world have never heard the message of salvation. Jimmie Lovell, the father of World Bible School, used to say that "no man has a right to hear the gospel twice until every man has heard it once." Unreached peoples deserve the church's prayerful attention.

We should learn as much as we can about the field we choose by studying its history, language, culture and spiritual condition. Fortunately, we have a growing number of men and women who have dedicated themselves to helping missionaries and churches find this kind of information and develop intelligent plans for reaching people of different backgrounds.

Once we have chosen the field, we must stay the course. Mission work is always difficult. Unless we are committed for the long haul, we will become discouraged and give up. Jesus never promised it would be easy. What he did promise was that "at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." (NIV)