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At the very end of his Gospel, Luke records the story of a man named Cleopas who was traveling with a friend on the road leading to Emmaus. As they walked, they went over the things they had experienced during the previous few days. In the midst of their conversation, Jesus came up and joined them and asked them what they were talking about. This interruption caused them to stop short and with sad hearts ask this man they didn’t recognize if he was the only visitor to Jerusalem who was unaware of the death of Jesus. Jesus, the one they thought had come to redeem his people, had been handed over to be crucified by their priests and leaders. And when they mentioned their astonishment that some women had reported that he was alive, Jesus reminded them that Moses and the Prophets had written that the Messiah needed to suffer before entering into glory.

The conversation that began on the road continued over a meal during which Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and shared it with them. This significant act, along with the moving of the Spirit in their hearts, opened their eyes to the identity of their traveling companion and gave meaning to their recent experiences. An unexpected encounter during a seemingly ordinary journey warmed their hearts and changed their lives forever.

This happens whenever people come to recognize Jesus as Savior and Lord. Their journey in life is interrupted by someone they don’t know, and they need an explanation and a sign, along with the eye-opening power of the Holy Spirit, to make sense of what is happening to them. While they began their journey without Jesus, from this point on they travel with him.

This issue of Mission Round Table centers on journeying with Jesus, a theme that will be examined from a number of different perspectives. The first article emerges from the OMF Mission Research Consultation 2016 that was held in Singapore during the last week of April to address the issue of “The Future of Mission.” It comes as a promise that more papers from the consultation will appear in future issues. In this article I trace the response of CIM and OMF leadership to the challenges of accepting members from Pentecostal and charismatic backgrounds into a mission that is more broadly evangelical. Since some of the greatest church growth in recent decades has occurred among Pentecostal and charismatic churches, it is inevitable that the challenges will not go away. An important lesson to learn is how a mission agency can maintain unity amidst differing theological understandings and practices.

Two articles follow that address the spiritual life of missionaries. Neel Roberts demonstrates the impact of the printed word upon the thoughts and practice of many missionaries and reasons that dead men, who continue to speak through their writings, remain trustworthy guides for generations of missionaries. In an interview, David Burke challenges us to focus on some pertinent issues missionaries face in their spiritual walks and encourages us to travel with the one who was and is always there for us.

The men on the Emmaus Road were surprised when their journey led to a new realization of what faith in Jesus Christ means. Angie Chang relays the moving story of a Thai woman who believed in Jesus after leprosy forced her to make the trek to the OMF hospital in Manorom. Though her encounter with the Lord didn’t ensure a life without hardship, her faith has kept her going for more than fifty years. In an article extracted from an early China’s Millions, George Gibb, the third General Director of the CIM, tells the story of how a number of Chinese people heard and responded to the gospel and remained faithful in their walk of faith until death. As Jojie Wong explains, surprise doesn’t just come when one hears the gospel; it also comes when one realizes that God is interested in people outside the invisible walls of one’s own culture and that we are all responsible to see that others hear the wonderful news about Jesus. In our closing article, J. E. likens the Christian life to walking on a glass footpath. Though it is secure, it can also be scary for those who walk by sight.

In the next two issues of Mission Round Table we will publish more papers from our Consultation. Later this year we will look at “the majority world and global mission,” with papers on partnership, urban ministry, and indigenous mission movements. At the beginning of 2017 we will consider the place of mission agencies as the twenty-first century progresses. If you have anything to share on either of these topics, or if you have read a book that you would like to recommend to a wider audience, please send your ideas to the editor.
CIM/OMF and the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement

Walter McConnell

Walter’s journey began in western Washington State where he first discovered the twin joys of roaming in the mountains and delving into God’s word. Many trips to and from California allowed him to earn a BA at Biola before flying off to Taiwan for a two-year short-term experience. His eyes opened to the needs, he returned to North America where he gained an MCS at Regent College in Vancouver before joining OMF in 1987. After serving in Taiwan for two terms and earning a PhD in Old Testament, Walter joined the faculty at Singapore Bible College. He now heads OMF’s mission research department and enjoys traveling and hiking with his wife Claire. When not in Singapore, they make their home near the north coast of Northern Ireland.

1. Introduction

The foundations of the modern pentecostal movement is usually traced to the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles led by William Seymour, a black preacher who was born in Louisiana and soundly converted to Holiness theology while attending a Church of God in Cincinnati. Early in 1906, Seymour was invited to help pastor a Holiness church in the heart of Los Angeles. Though the door to that church was soon barred because of his preaching about speaking in tongues, he secured an abandoned mission building on Azusa Street which became the wellspring of a revival that quickly crossed ethnic, linguistic, and national boundaries. For three years people flocked to the dilapidated building to witness the strange events that were happening. Some came to experience a new work of the Holy Spirit and to be filled with his power. Others gathered to gape at the spectacle of “holy rollers” laid out on the floor and to marvel over the strange syllables uttered throughout the assembly. Yet others determined to evaluate the movement according to biblical revelation, many of whom were not convinced by the explanations given for the manifestations.

In the years since the Azusa Street revival, similar responses have followed pentecostal teaching wherever it has spread. The vigor of worldwide pentecostal and charismatic churches bears witness to the difference it has made in the lives of many and of its missionary roots. But despite its growth, many remain cautious about the movement because of the phenomena and some teachings that are associated with it. And while some are attracted to the movement by their study of the Bible, others remain unconvinced that Scripture supports the modern practice of some phenomena or that explanations given for them are based on sound exegesis of relevant biblical texts.
This paper examines not the movement as a whole, but the response of the China Inland Mission and its successor, the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, to the theological dilemmas that arose with the spread of the pentecostal and charismatic movements beginning in the early twentieth century, particularly as it impacted membership. It should come as no surprise that members of the organization reflected the common responses in the church and society at large. But while the reaction of the missionaries on the ground is a good gauge of the mission’s response, of greater importance is the overall stance of the organization as laid down by leadership reflected in their decision making and policy documents. It is mainly these “official” stances that are of interest here. Though different members and friends of CIM/OMF at different times may have been able to say, “But that wasn’t my experience,” the intent of this paper is to consider the authoritative texts intended to steer mission practice.

The kinship between the pentecostal and charismatic movements can be identified through a number of distinctively Spirit-focused doctrines such as the continuation of New Testament spiritual gifts in the present church and (usually) an emphasis on the baptism in the Spirit following conversion, (3) dispensational premillennialism as developed in Plymouth Brethren teaching, (4) the evangelical faith healing movement, and (5) a restorationist longing for New Testament Christianity with an accompanied “latter rain” of the Holy Spirit that would usher in a great evangelistic harvest at the end of the age. The connection is made stronger since the categories overlap in significant ways. Though this cannot be developed in detail, we will consider how it played out in the life of Hudson Taylor and the early development of the CIM.

Hudson Taylor grew up in what was very much a model Methodist home. His great-grandfather, James Taylor, similarly took up the role of lay preacher and served as class leader. The next James Taylor, who sired James Hudson and his siblings, raised his children to trust in God, introduced them to his Methodist beliefs and associates, and planted in them a heart for missions.

While it is well known that Hudson was a time repudiated the faith and traced his conversion to a chance encounter with a tract he found lying around the house, it is far less known that it was only much later, in 1869, that he came to experience what he called “the exchanged life.” In part, this experience was connected with some articles published by R. Pearsall Smith in The Revival magazine that stirred a number of members of the nascent CIM to seek what was at that time often called “holiness” or “the victorious life” or “union with Christ,” and has been referred to as Keswick teaching. To Taylor this was, in a very real sense, a second experience of God’s love and presence that he believed gave him power to live and work for His Savior.

Taylor’s Methodist roots and experience of the exchanged life were further impacted by his friendship with early Brethren leaders such as George Müller, William Berger, and Henry Grattan Guinness. Ideas he received from them influenced his development of the CIM into a non-sectarian, trans-denominational society. And while he was never a member of a Brethren assembly, his relationships with people within the loose movement resulted in

Though it is rarely appreciated, both the China Inland Mission and the pentecostal movement emerged from similar backgrounds as they were both greatly impacted by the broader evangelicalism that sprang from the First and Second Great Awakenings.

2. Common backgrounds

Though it is rarely appreciated, both the China Inland Mission and the pentecostal movement emerged from similar backgrounds as they were both greatly impacted by the broader evangelicalism that sprang from the First and Second Great Awakenings. Klaus Fiedler’s study of faith missions identifies three movements that influenced the development of the CIM and similar organizations: “the holiness movement, the Brethren movement and the prophetic movement.” This list is echoed in and augmented by a standard work on the pentecostal and charismatic movement which discerns its roots in (1) Wesleyan holiness, (2) the “higher-life” teaching of Charles Finney and others that emphasized a second experience following conversion, (3) dispensational premillennialism as developed in Plymouth Brethren teaching, (4) the evangelical faith healing movement, and (5) a restorationist longing for New Testament Christianity with an accompanied “latter rain” of the Holy Spirit that would usher in a great evangelistic harvest at the end of the age. The connection is made stronger since the categories overlap in significant ways. Though this cannot be developed in detail, we will consider how it played out in the life of Hudson Taylor and the early development of the CIM.
In the mid to late nineteenth century, Brethren teaching on prophecy led many evangelicals to turn from a post-millennial to a pre-millennial eschatology with its expectation of Christ’s imminent return. Premillennialism so impacted A. B. Simpson that “Christ the coming King” became one aspect of the “fourfold gospel” that lay behind the Christian and Missionary Alliance and was adopted by a number of Pentecostal denominations such as the Foursquare Church. A main feature of early premillennialism as often preached was that the return of Christ was tied to the mission of the church. Since Jesus would return only after the gospel had been preached to the whole earth, it was incumbent upon his disciples to take his message everywhere. This powerful motivation spurred many to join the CIM and the Pentecostal missionary societies that later appeared. According to Fiedler, “The conviction that it was possible to evangelize the world before Christ’s return or even to speed it, was a major reason why faith missions gave top priority to the unreached areas of the world.”

Due to their common background, members of the CIM and the original Pentecostals exhibited the common vocabulary then current in holiness circles if not wider evangelism. China’s Millions thus trumpeted the turning of large numbers of tribals to Christ as “Pentecostal blessings” both on its cover and a major article that supplied the core of a short book titled A Modern Pentecost: Being the story of the Revival among the Aborigines of West China. There was a widespread feeling that the Holy Spirit was preparing to work as he did in the first century. This great expectation can be seen in the publication of several major articles on the person and work of the Holy Spirit in the 1907 North American edition of China’s Millions. Indeed, the need of the power of the Holy Spirit in ministry, and prayers to the Holy Spirit for cleansing and conviction were regular features in China’s Millions.

3. Response to the early pentecostal movement

Despite their shared backgrounds, CIM and OMF members and leaders have not always accepted charismatic teaching and practice. Even so, Fiedler’s suggestion—that since the faith missions were spawned in the revivals of 1859 and 1873 and because leaders of one revival neither expect nor accept subsequent ones, “when the pentecostal revival broke less than two generations later they … could only see these newcomers as a nuisance or as teachers of wrong doctrine”—fails to satisfy. While his generalization reflects a truth that many CIMers rejected the unique aspects of pentecostal theology, it probably overemphasizes the sentiment that participants in one revival believed theirs is the last and neglects the truth that many CIM/OMF members came into the mission far too late to be considered children or even grandchildren of the 1859 and 1873 revivals though they remained in opposition to or ambivalent about Pentecostalism.

Though CIM literature from the early twentieth century makes few direct references to the new pentecostal movement, the reaction of members paralleled that of the evangelical world of their day. Some CIMers were convinced that Pentecostalism was true, others rejected it wholly, and yet more were happy to work with Pentecostals even if they weren’t convinced by the teaching. One of the earliest, and undoubtedly the most important, CIM member to become a Pentecostal was Cecil Polhill (1860–1938). Originally known as Cecil Polhill-Turner, he was one of the Cambridge Seven and had sailed for China in 1885. Though he spent many of his years with the CIM trying to establish a foothold in Tibet, he was unable to advance beyond the fringes of that land when he returned to England during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. Shortly thereafter he inherited the family fortune and was invited to serve on the London Council of the CIM. In January 1908, on the way back from a short trip to China, he stopped off in America where he was “baptized in the Spirit” in Long Beach, California.
CIM leadership was quickly appraised of Polhill’s experience as he sent other Pentecostals to work in China and Tibet as members of the Pentecostal Missionary Union. But even before those workers arrived, a “Special Council Meeting” was held on 3 February 1909 to discuss candidates who were “associated with what is known as the ‘Tongues or Apostolic Movement’.” The minutes record that “persons professing to have the gift of tongues” had held meetings in China that were “characterized by undesirable proceedings.” Candidates from Pentecostal backgrounds were informed of their need to loyally “recognize those responsible for carrying on the work in China” and to accept “the decision of the Mission Authorities as to their attending meetings in connection with this movement, or not.” These were amongst the earliest of strictures placed upon Pentecostals in the CIM. Even so, they were not random limitations placed upon one group; all members who supported doctrines that were not universally recognized by Christians were required to curb their enthusiasm for the wellbeing of the wider fellowship.

Restrictions did not mean outright rejection. Extracts from a letter written by Theodore Howard to Polhill at that time imply that Polhill was considering presenting Pentecostals as candidates for CIM membership and mention only two conditions that would cause Pentecostal applicants to be rejected: (1) they believed that God would give them the ability to speak Chinese without having to take the time to do so;23 and (2) they believed that only those who spoke in tongues had full fellowship with the Holy Spirit. As long as they were willing to work together with all who love the Lord and not just with those who agreed with them on this matter, there was no reason that someone would be dismissed for speaking in tongues.24

The fact that Polhill continued to serve on the CIM London Council and sent both financial support and candidates to the mission for many years testifies to his acceptance of these conditions. Even so, before the “Special Council Meeting” was held, Polhill was already busy establishing the Pentecostal Missionary Union. This society, which began in January 1909, was modelled after the CIM and initially focused work on its founder’s long-time destination—Tibet. For a number of years the two organizations worked side by side and shared in each other’s training and ministries.

What began as a positive arrangement soured sometime around 1914. In part, this can be traced to a former CMA missionary, W. W. Simpson, who, after becoming Pentecostal, travelled around China insisting that every missionary should become Pentecostal too. He brought this message to a number of CIM stations along with a circular in which he cited Polhill as a character reference and charged other missionaries of being lukewarm “Laodiceans.”25 Around the same time, a couple of CIM members complained about PMU “waiting meetings” being held in Yunnan.26 After discussing the issues for some time, CIM leadership decided to ban these meetings, stating that while in some cases blessings came from them, they are often “of a dangerous character” so that “the strain upon the brain occasionally is such that in some cases insanity has ensued.”27

In the end, the Council decided to sever ties with the PMU. The wording of the document demonstrates the concern leadership had “to keep faith both with fellow-workers in the Mission and with supporters at home” who did not accept pentecostal doctrine and practice. This concern for the response of members and constituents would become a common refrain and impact decisions to be made for a half century and more.

In April 1915 it was suggested that the mission should prepare a statement on its attitude to the pentecostal movement.28 This statement was drafted by D. E. Hoste and J. Stark and sent to the Home and China Councils for their consideration and approval. The main thrust of the statement is as follows. (1) One cannot rule out modern day speaking in tongues from Scripture. Even so, all claims about receiving this gift and practicing it should be subject to biblical revelation. (2) The “Mission cannot have any connection” with the movement lest it be misunderstood by its members and constituents. (3) A true pastoral spirit should be demonstrated toward anyone who has been led into error due to any irregularities and excesses encountered in meetings.29

As with earlier decisions, while no outright ban was placed on Pentecostals being part of CIM, room for maneuver was severely limited, particularly with regard to some doctrines on the Holy Spirit and sanctification.

### 4. Response to the rise of the charismatic movement

China in the first half of the twentieth century knew little but war. Sun Yat Sen fought the Ching Dynasty to establish the Republic. Chinese warlords waged incessant battles to control districts of greater or lesser size. The Sino-Japanese war drenched the land with blood. World War II was not long over before Mao Zedong and the Communists liberated China at the cost of millions of lives. Throughout those years, CIM missionaries struggled to remain with the people they loved and longed to see grafted into the tree of life. In the early 1950s, when it became clear that it would be best for the church in China if all foreign missionaries withdrew, CIM leadership wrestled over what their future would hold. Should they, as an organization founded to take the gospel into the interior of China, disband since their objective was no longer possible or should they reformulate in some way? Long conferences held at Kalorama near Melbourne, Hong Kong, and Bournemouth were impacted by pleas for help coming from churches throughout Southeast Asia. In the end, the agency continued to serve “overseas” from China as the Overseas Missionary Fellowship.30

The political upheaval that followed the Second World War resulted in many European colonies in Asia receiving their independence. The confusion at the time was heightened as Communism spread from Russia to China to North Korea and induced fear that the new governments of Asia might fall like dominos. While the “Red Scare” was at its height and it seemed that ground was being lost to anti-Christian forces, many Christian churches and organizations, including OMF, fell under the scrutiny of some who wanted to ensure they remained faithful to the gospel and orthodox Christianity. Many believers were instructed to separate themselves from anyone who did not pass the test. In many instances, separation...
was demanded to a “second degree” level. “Good Christians” would not have fellowship with anyone who shared fellowship with “liberals” or “ecumenicals.” Organizations like OMF were forced to be very careful about who they associated with lest members or constituents conclude that they had started down the slippery slope into apostasy.

Just at this time, a new movement hit the churches that was in many ways similar to the Pentecostalism of the early decades of the century except that it wasn’t limited to the classical Pentecostal denominations but spread throughout many denominations and non-denominational churches. Its similarity to the earlier movement resulted in it sometimes being called neo-Pentecostalism, though it has become more widely known as the charismatic movement. The growth of this movement moved OMF leadership to return to the questions of an earlier generation to see how they applied in a new context in which constituents might cut off funds if they determined that the mission was “guilty by association.” Pressure from members and constituents clearly influenced decisions, and many times charismatic issues were discussed in the context of what to do about the ecumenical movement and the Roman Catholic Church. Since many supporters looked upon all three with suspicion, the mission needed to make a careful response. It is significant that while the three issues were considered together, OMF leadership did not respond to each in the same way.

A powerful sign of the mission’s stance on an issue is the deliberations of its General Director, particularly when he speaks on behalf of the Council. Throughout the sixties, J. O. Sanders wrote a number of articles on spiritual gifts and the charismatic movement. In an article entitled “The Charismatic Movement,” he acknowledged that evangelicals were split in their response, and though he later delineated some “dangers and limitations” of the movement, began by positively remarking on the number of Latin American and Indonesian Pentecostals and how charismatic congregations from Seattle to London were growing in size and conversions. His conclusions for the Fellowship mix caution with openness.

While we may disagree with some aspects of the movement, who can deny that God has worked and is working through it in spite of some erroneous emphases? … In appraising the movement we must remember that no question of heresy is involved and therefore the question of limitation of fellowship on those grounds does not arise. The vast majority of “Pentecostals” tenaciously hold all the great evangelical doctrines, and we must therefore exercise care and Christian love in our attitude toward these fellow-members of the Body of Christ.

While direct engagement with WCC members or Roman Catholics was barred, the door remained open to work with Pentecostals and charismatics. The major sticking point continued to be a “concern over the divisive tendency due to emphasis upon charismatic gifts” by certain workers. Indeed, in 1968 when two couples resigned from their ministry in Thailand, the issue was not the fact that they had a charismatic experience but their continued insistence that their experience should be normative for other members of the mission and their refusal to heed the repeated calls of their leaders not to propagate their views since it had already sowed disunity.

The concern for unity was key. In a 1968 article, Sanders made it clear that the major problem leadership had with charismatics was the promotion of their views to the point that it caused division. As he states, charismatics were free to join OMF. They were free to testify to what the Lord had
done in their lives and express their “personal views on the subject in the course of a balanced ministry of the Word,” so long as the subject was not artificially introduced or over-emphasized or unduly pressed upon the hearers. They were free to practice the gift in private or with their spouse. OMF leadership did not want to “restrict personal liberty, but to invite renunciation of such liberty … in the interests of spiritual unity.” To help members better understand what was in view, Sanders raised the possibility that someone who believed infant baptism or a particular millennial view to be valid might try to convert others to their position. If this happened, leadership would feel obliged to step in and ask them to desist. The overriding issue was not whether one view on a controversial subject was wrong, but how it affected spiritual unity across an international and interdenominational Fellowship. These views were communicated to the Fellowship in what is sometimes known as the first OMF Charismatic Statement.

### 5. A new statement for a new age

The second General Director to address the issue was Michael Griffiths who, at Central Council in 1973, delivered a paper and submitted a “Draft statement of the OMF’s position regarding the charismatic movement.” At the time around 10% of the mission’s members claimed to have had a charismatic experience and many of them had clearly received spiritual benefit from it. It only seemed right to review earlier statements and develop a new one that considered such issues as teaching, propagation, public use, and a two-staged enduement with power teaching. The issues were complex and far reaching.

As in the sixties, the major concern OMF leadership had about the movement was its potential to cause division. While it was not considered divisive to hold or even defend distinctively charismatic views, intentionally propagating such views could be, particularly if they caused offense to others. For the sake of unity, dogmatic interpretations needed to be set to the side and not promoted as the only possible biblical interpretation. A secondary concern that came out during the discussion, even though it was omitted from the statement produced in the end, was the possible reaction of OMF constituents. As some saw it, “if the Fellowship were to relax its attitude toward the active propagation of charismatic teaching it would seriously affect candidate intake and financial support in some home countries.” Since CIM/OMF had always been recognized as a non-Pentecostal mission, the reaction of the vast majority of members and their supporters had to be taken into account before any major change was instituted that could lead to losses in membership and support. The problem was made more difficult because supporters and members in some countries (like the UK) thought that OMF should not be seen to oppose the charismatic movement, while those in other countries (like the USA) did not want the mission to grant more freedom to speak in tongues. How can a split constituency be appeased?

Another important consideration was the reality that by the early seventies the movement had evolved to the point where speaking in tongues was sometimes seen as being much less divisive than the practice of the “spectacular” gifts such as healing, miracles, and discerning of spirits. To some eyes, these were at times practiced in ways that seemed similar to “auto-suggestion and white magic,” if not “almost animistic.” In reviewing these considerations, Griffiths expressed his concern that the problem caused by extreme teaching about the Holy Spirit might cause some to cease entirely from teaching about the Holy Spirit and his gifts, a situation that would be unconscionable. A right understanding of the Spirit and spiritual gifts was essential, but how could that be carried out in a climate in which widely divergent understandings were held?

Though the issues were extremely complicated and the likelihood of misunderstanding incredibly high, Griffiths led the Council in developing a statement to provide workable guidelines for the situation then faced by the Fellowship. The resulting statement rightly acknowledged that all Christians are both deficient in their understanding of some doctrines and in need of the supply and empowering of the Holy Spirit. It denied, however, that the gift of tongues was “an indispensable evidence of the baptism or the filling of the Holy Spirit.” It also denied that all Christians should be expected to speak in tongues since the Bible clearly says that the Spirit gives gifts according to his will and that not everyone speaks in tongues (1 Cor 12:11, 29–30). Addressing the major concern, the statement highlighted the need to work for unity in the Spirit and refrain from that which causes division. It also took up “practical concerns” such as teaching about disputed matters or practicing gifts in a way or place that might offend other members. It further permitted members to attend (though not lead or plan) charismatic meetings, as long as such attendance didn’t become an excuse for not meeting with other members for fellowship and prayer.

While the statement could not satisfy everyone, it showed that OMF leadership longed to see missionaries walking in the Spirit and at peace with each other. It also attempted to refocus both supporters and opposers of certain gifts and experiences who had been distracted from “our main business of preaching, teaching, planting and perfecting churches.” The fact that the statement is part of a discussion entitled “Accommodation of Differing Viewpoints within an International/Interdenominational Fellowship” demonstrates that leadership viewed the doctrines and practices that characterized the charismatic movement to be secondary matters of faith, like the mode and timing of baptism, form of church government, and eschatological positions, that members could differ on as long as they worked together in unity.
6. Response to the “Signs and Wonders” movement

A further development in OMF’s thinking about charismatic issues arose in the early to mid-1980s with the development of the “Signs and Wonders” movement. This movement was closely associated with John Wimber and the Vineyard fellowship and the “Signs and Wonders” course he taught at Fuller Seminary. It is further linked to the “Third Wave Movement” as coined and described by C. Peter Wagner. Many who attended the popular Fuller course and read Wimber’s book, Power Evangelism, were challenged to integrate prayer for the sick and exorcism of evil spirits into their verbal proclamation of the gospel so that the “signs and wonders” that accompanied preaching might convince people of the reality of Christian faith in Jesus.

At this time, some members of the mission re-examined CIM/OMF history and discovered that whereas praying for the sick and exorcism may not have been common, they were not unknown. Hudson Taylor, Henry Frost, J. O. Fraser, Pastor Hsi, and others prayed for the healing of physical diseases and that people would be released from demons. A Central Council examination of the movement produced a statement that acknowledged and rejoiced in the way God had shown his sovereign power throughout CIM/OMF history. The Council also agreed that in spite of “questionable features” found in parts of the Signs and Wonders Movement the mission “should not ignore the evidence of the Spirit’s work” and both learn from and apply what Scripture has to teach about the subject. They further determined to study materials being produced by the movement and to expect that the power of the Spirit be seen as we preach the gospel. Their review of the issues in the eighties led to another reformulation of the charismatic statement. In part, this was because it had become clear that different interpretations of the 1973 statement were in play. It was also to update the statement for a new day and a different set of circumstances. Following earlier statements, it was considered under “Points of Difference.” An organization made up of people “drawn from many different cultures, races, nationalities and denominations” will inevitably reflect differences in outlook on many issues including “baptism, church government, eschatology and charismatic gifts.” Since these matters are not “fundamental to the basic character of the gospel, members are expected to respect each other’s personal convictions” and to refrain from propagating views that will cause division or offense to others. Spiritual unity and care for the feelings of fellow believers stand out as an essential aspect of membership in the Fellowship.

This statement was the first to recognize that some OMF members were cessationists who believe that the gifts of the Spirit were only for the apostolic age, others believed that the gifts continued through the ages, and others saw them as the restoration of first-century Christianity in our day. It also regarded the first and last of these positions as opposites, though it nowhere developed that concept.

Three basic principles were delineated. (1) The Fellowship as such does not endorse any interpretation regarding a two-stage experience in the Christian’s life but frees members to hold a particular view. (2) The Fellowship believes that spiritual gifts are available to all as a sovereign gift from God and links no gift to any post-regenerational experience. (3) Despite differences in understanding, members pursue unity in seeking God, knowing his blessings, and enjoying the power of the Spirit as they preach the gospel. The statement then mentioned how these principles could be applied to some issues that were particularly relevant at the time: tongues, prophecy, word of wisdom/word of knowledge, teaching on spiritual gifts, involvement in churches, and promotion of charismatic teaching.

7. At the turn of a new millennium

The approach of the new millennium caused evangelistic plans to increase and end of the world speculation to rise until both were at a fever pitch. Fear that the Y2K bug would spark worldwide computer failure and throw the world back into the dark ages if it didn’t simultaneously release a thermnuclear holocaust sent millions scurrying for supplies that would see them through at least some of the turbulent days to come. At the same time, a bevy of Christian organizations released blueprints to show how the final stage of world evangelization could be completed by the year 2000. End-time speculation was fed by fictional accounts of the Great Tribulation and Christ’s return, and interest in spiritual warfare skyrocketed after Frank Peretti released This Present Darkness, and its sequels.

It was against this backdrop that the OMF Charismatic Statement next came up for renewal. In many ways the new formulation followed earlier statements, while expanding some ideas. Members were reminded that the purpose of the exercise was to help an organization composed of an international and aologically diverse group of individuals, “keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace,” by maintaining the basic gospel truths which hold unity higher than the differences in biblical interpretation that could bring division. An extended section on the “theological basis” for the statement explained the official
view of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, different views of spiritual gifts, and an examination of speaking in tongues in the New Testament and the need to practice (or not practice) gifts in a way that promotes unity within the Fellowship.

Though somewhat reworded, the basic principles from the previous version were retained. The guidelines for practice were strengthened and more biblical references given to support the official position on spiritual gifts (including tongues, revelatory gifts, and healing) and ways these should be used by members of the Fellowship. While freedom in one’s private practice of gifts was retained (biblical texts were supplied to guide public practice), an official separation between the Fellowship and the charismatic movement was kept in place—OMF was not a charismatic mission agency—and members were required not to take part in the planning of charismatic meetings. Since the Fellowship exists to serve the church in Asia, a newly raised concern was that members adhere to the practice of spiritual gifts as understood in and regulated by churches where they minister.

8. Demotion of the charismatic statement

The OMF charismatic statement developed as a means of communicating with members, potential members, and supporters about its position on an issue that caused controversy in the church. While the controversy over charismatic issues has not gone away, it has died down to a great extent due to the growing numbers of charismatics, their prominence in many parts of the world, the impact of their teaching on the wider Christian community, their earnestness to reach out in mission, and (in many cases) their ability not to treat others as though they lacked spiritual gifting or power.

While charismatics have increasingly become recognized as part of mainstream evangelicalism, OMF has engaged in a major new push to send missionaries to places that are not officially OMF sending countries. In the past, many missionaries were sent out through a third country (e.g., a Pole might be sent out by the UK or a Brazilian through the USA). That path, however, can be cumbersome and raises questions about who the sending agent really is—the church in the home country or the sending country? Is there a way to simplify this process? Specifically, what can be done so that people from the southern hemisphere—where the church is growing, healthy, and predominantly charismatic—can join OMF? As various social, linguistic, and economic impediments were addressed toward this end, the OMF charismatic statement could not be overlooked.

These changes have led OMF leaders to again reexamine the response the mission should have toward the movement. The ultimate purpose of the reassessment was identified in the heading for the section—“Unity Statement.” According to the International Executive Council minutes, “The intention was to produce a broad theologically grounded statement about how the Fellowship works in unity when there are issues about which evangelical Christians disagree.” Along with a broad statement on unity, a list was to be provided of the kind of issues on which not all evangelicals agree and a statement about how unity could be maintained with regard to each issue. In the end, charismatic renewal and women in ministry were addressed directly, but other issues that might cause division, such as baptism, church government, and eschatology were not.

With the promotion of an “OMF Statement on Unity,” the charismatic statement will be moved to an appendix of the OMF Handbook to indicate its use as a supporting document that gives more information about how the Statement on Unity should impact principles and practices and provide an example of how Christians with different views on certain matters can work in love and the unity of the Spirit.

Conclusion

When Hudson Taylor founded the China Inland Mission, neither Pentecostalism nor the charismatic movement existed and they remained unknown at the time of his death. In the years since, this movement that began at the fringes of evangelicalism has grown to world-wide prominence. When it first emerged, some people accepted it wholeheartedly, some scoffed, and others welcomed some of its teachings and practices while they rejected others. Over the years, certain emphases have waxed and waned and in some cases, been supplanted by others. When people encounter it today, their reactions are similar to the reactions of the early years though often more welcoming. What is true for society (and Christian society) at large is true for missionaries from the CIM/OMF tradition.

As we look to the future, it is highly likely that as the percentage of evangelicals who have had a pentecostal or charismatic experience increases, the percentage of OMF members who have had such experiences will increase. Since what this will mean for the future of the mission is uncertain, we should raise a few considerations for both OMF leaders and members.

1. It is essential to remember that the pentecostal/charismatic movement is neither monolithic nor static. During the past century it has taken a number of different shapes, some of which have been extremely conservative theologically and others have been heretical. The existence of heretics among charismatics should not cause us to reject the whole movement any more than the existence of a Church of England bishop who does not believe that Jesus literally rose from the dead should cause us to reject the whole Anglican community. Each candidate must be taken on his or her own merits and face the same level of scrutiny as any other candidate. The same should be true for their sending churches. The main principle here is that we should reject arguments that set up a strawman in the name of Pentecostalism (or any other group) and then knock it down because of deficiencies in one part of the movement and/or because of our own inadequate understanding of the whole.

2. The decisions rendered by OMF leadership over the years point to two overriding principles that should be retained as long as candidates come from different theological backgrounds. The first is that the beliefs and practices of individual missionaries should be based as much as possible on biblical teaching. Where the Bible gives clear teaching on an issue, this may be easy. Even so, as with baptism and church government, different interpretations
of one or two verses can result in wide variations in practice. And, as with many other issues, the Bible sometimes says far less about a topic than we would like it to. We must be careful lest the Protestant insistence on sola scriptura be reduced to my personal interpretation of the Bible. It is essential that dialogue remain open to ensure that understandings are clearly stated and that the major biblical doctrines are given a higher place than personal or denominational idiosyncrasies.

3. The second overriding principle that should guide all responses to this and other issues is the pursuit of unity in the context of diversity. This reflects one of OMF’s seven stated values: “We celebrate diversity in unity.” The CIM was founded to be an interdenominational mission and immediately became an international organization. Diversity remains a strong part of OMF’s identity just as it is in worldwide Christianity. But while honoring diversity, the mission seeks unity in the Spirit, unity in the major biblical truths, and unity in ministry. Those who are willing to work within those parameters should be welcomed warmly. Closely connected to this is willingness to set aside issues that can cause division.

4. Another principle that should be remembered is that OMF leaders and members should show concern for members, supporters, and the churches with which they work. As an organization’s identity is rooted in its members and constituents, their feelings and understandings should not be treated lightly. While this does not mean that the mission should be held at ransom by its supporters, it does mean that if a decision would make a sizeable number feel compelled to withdraw from service or withhold support, leadership should think twice about implementing the policy. If there are good biblical or legal or social reasons why something should be done, the loss in supporters and members might be regrettable but necessary. Even so, leadership should never attempt to weigh potential loss with potential gain as though a zero-sum game was being played between people from different countries, denominations, or theological positions. As declared in several earlier statements, pastoral care for the hurting, confused, and misled should underlie all decisions about matters where evangelicals hold divergent views. Care should be equally extended to charismatic and non-charismatic members, as hurt, confusion, and being led astray are not the experiences of only one group.

5. Finally, there is great wisdom in completing a thorough historical and theological study of any issue like OMF’s response to charismatic practice before beginning to rewrite a policy statement. By placing the development of a statement in its historical context and working through the theological and personal issues that led to its formation, one attains a broader perspective and concern for everyone involved, along with deeper insight into the real issues at stake. Writing up such a study provides leadership with a valuable guide as they reflect on the past and make decisions that will impact the future. MRT

Endnotes


4 The pentecostal/charismatic movement is far from monolithic in its beliefs and

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practices. While writers frequently combine pentecostal and charismatic with a slash as I did above, there are also clear distinctions, some of which are related to historical and ecclesiastical issues and others theological. The initial ecclesiastical distinction identifies the “classical Pentecostal” denominations (e.g., the Assemblies of God, the Churches of God, the Churches of God in Christ, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, and the Pentecostal Holiness Church) as those that arose in the early twentieth century, trace their roots to the holiness movements of the nineteenth century, and accepted Charles Parham’s teaching that speaking in tongues was the first evidence of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. (Not every early Pentecostal denomination taught that the baptism in the Spirit was evidenced by speaking in tongues. For instance, the Elim denomination [one of the largest British Pentecostal denominations] taught that the baptism in the Spirit was simply accompanied “with signs.”) In contrast, charismatics developed in the second half of the twentieth century and, while accepting the biblical charismata as valid for today, initially remained loyal to their denominational roots while desiring to see a fresh movement of the Spirit empower their church life and ministry. Historical and ecclesiastical differences aside, the movements usually are and probably should be seen as close kin. Further distinctions are found when one discovers that in Latin America “charismatic” refers to charismatic Catholics and “Pentecostal” is reserved for Protestants (including many from Reformed backgrounds) who have had pentecostal experiences. See Vinsyn Synan, _The Twentieth-Century Pentecostal Explosion_ (Altamonte Springs, Florida: Creation House, 1987), 9–11. For a longer introduction to the charismatic movement that considers differences between it and traditional Pentecostalism, see P. D. Hocken, “Charismatic Movement,” in _Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements_, ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1988), 130–60. Charles Hummel writes that “Unlike many movements in church history speaking in tongues, or xenolalia, has allowed the renewal has sprung up spontaneously in a variety of shapes and forms.” He then lists the “three main streams” as classical Pentecostalism, neo-Pentecostalism, and Catholic Pentecostalism. Hummel, _Fire in the Fireplace: Contemporary Charismatic Renewal_ (Downers Grove: IVP, 1978), 39. To Hummel’s list, some will add the “Third Wave,” a movement that others will see as part of the charismatic movement. 3 An example of a borderline group is Oneness Pentecostalism which has been described as “a unique expression of Christianity on the fringe of the evangelical-Pentecostal movement” that “While sharing a common religious heritage and inheriting much of its theology … stands outside the accepted canons of orthodoxy by its rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity and Trinitarian baptism.” D. A. Reed, “Oneness Pentecostalism,” in _Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements_, 644–51. See also J. Lee Grady, “The Other Pentecostals,” _Charisma_ 22 (June 1997), http://forerunner.com/orthodoxy/cu197123.htm (accessed 6 April 2016).


8 A. J. Broomhall, _Barbarians at the Gate, Hudson Taylor and China’s Open Century_, Vol 1 (Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton and OMF, 1981), 98.

9 Broomhall, _Barbarians at the Gate_, 282.


12 On a side note, when the Ulster revival broke out in 1839 Guinness was in Canada where he lead A. B. Simpson to the Lord. Simpson would later found the Christian and Missionary Alliance and exert a great influence on the early development of Pentecostalism.

13 Broomhall, _A Thousand Lives_, 447.

14 Austin, _China’s Millions_, 193.

15 See Fiedler, _Faith Missions_, 272–83.

16 Fiedler, _Faith Missions_, 278. This expectation found its way into _China’s Millions_ when Cecil Polhill and family set sail for India to reach the borderlands of Tibet, “The times are growing more and more unsettled, and the Lord’s people are turned more than ever to the hope and expectation of His appearing. The day of widespread blessing in the barren heathen fields and the deliverance of Tibet and other countries totally without the Gospel must be quickly drawing near if a people is to be prepared for Him.” _China’s Millions_, British ed. (February 1896): 22.


20 The second work contains what appears to be an expansion of Torrey’s article from the _Millions_. The book also presents his view that “the baptism with the Holy Spirit is an operation of the Holy Spirit distinct from and additional to His regenerating work,” and that “in the baptism with the Holy Spirit, there is the impartation of power, and the one who receives it is fitted for service” that will manifest itself as believers use various spiritual gifts, but not necessarily tongues. _Pentecost and Work of the Holy Spirit_, 131, 134, 139–40, his italics.

21 Fiedler, _Faith Missions_, 113.


23 The photo of Polhill is from Usher, “For China and Tibet,” 1.


25 “Minutes of Special Council Meeting held in Shanghai on Wednesday, February 3, 1909, at 11:30 a.m.,” Billy Graham Center Archives Collection 213 Box 2 Folder 37 (BGCA 213 2.37).

26 Some early Pentecostals, like Charles Parham, who some say should be recognized “as the founder of the pentecostal movement,” believed that speaking in tongues was _suumulans—the ability to speak a foreign language supernaturally—and that it would empower missionaries to preach immediately to people in foreign countries. J. R. Goff Jr., “Parham, Charles Fox,” in _Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements_, 660. Polhill did not have this expectation, perhaps due to the years he spent learning Chinese and Tibetan. Usher, “For Christ and Tibet,” 158–9, 167–8. 

27 “Extracts from Mr. Howard’s letter referred to in the Minute,” BGCA 215 2.37.

28 This was the first European Pentecostal missionary society and was absorbed by the British Assemblies of God in 1925. Usher believes that one of his main reasons for establishing the mission was because the
Mission Round Table


“Minutes of Directors’ Meeting held in Singapore at 11 a.m., August 29th, 1967,” OMF Singapore Archives, AR6.1.4 Box 2.2 (OMFSA AR6.1.4, 2.2).

J. O. Sanders, “The Attitude of OMF to Speaking in Tongues,” *Overseas Bulletin* (April 1968): 18–20. It should be noted that Sanders acknowledged that charismatics weren’t the only ones who could cause division: “some who militantly oppose this teaching can cause division, and I would ask them to exercise grace.”


“Third Session of the Central Council combined with the Sixteenth Session of the Overseas Council, 13–26 October 1973,” OMFSA AR5.2.4, 1.16.


“Accommodation of Differing Viewpoints within an International/Interdenominational Fellowship CC:73, A:6,” 3. OMFSA AR5.2.4, 1.16.


This is supported by the paragraph introducing the Charismatic Statement in the 1976 OMF Handbook. “The following statement of policy in regard to the charismatic movement is included, not to single out one point of possible difference above any others, but because the nature of the discussions on the movement within the whole Church of God requires a statement of position at the present time.”


A distinction can be made between cessationists who believe that all the spiritual gifts ceased in the first century and those who believe that only the “sign gifts” ceased in the first century.

It is rarely recognized that this principle places people from both the cessationist and restorationist camps in a separate (second class?) category from those who believe gifts have always been active, particularly since they are instructed not to propagate their views, something that the drafters of this statement (who apparently hold to the “middle view”) have done by stating that “The Fellowship believes that spiritual gifts are available to all believers” (and thus propagating a view that may make cessationists uncomfortable) and by declaring that “The Fellowship does not link any post-regenerative blessing with access to any particular spiritual gift or gifts” though they did not allow restorationists to propagate their position. Effectually, moderates can propagate their view (as they have in this statement), but those holding to the “opposing views” cannot.


Peretti’s *This Present Darkness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1986) sold over 2.5 million copies.


Guiding Light from the Cloud

Neel Roberts

Neel Roberts graduated from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in 1986. He works in the Mekong Region where he is currently involved with Chiang Rai International Christian School in seeking ways to help bring quality education to neighboring Thai minority communities for the glory of Christ Jesus.

When I was about 19 years old I was walking through a cemetery and saw a small gravestone with the words:

*John Smith*
*1833–1851*
Youth is the time to serve the Lord.

It was not a long sermon but it was a powerful one. I am thankful that it was written. I am thankful that I read it. Jesus Christ was once asked, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”

And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matt 22:37–39, KJV)

Whatever age we are when we discover that it is time to serve the Lord, we will naturally ask how we might best do so. It is at such times that we seek guidance from those who are wiser and more experienced than ourselves. A reliable advisor is one who has run the race to the end and finished well. This can be problematic in some cultures. On the one hand, Christians are forbidden from using mediums to communicate with the dead, and on the other hand, the living have not finished the race. How can we overcome this great obstacle and gain the guidance we need? Happily, the solution was discovered thousands of years ago. It consists in written languages, education, libraries, printed books, and now online libraries. Most of my guides are temporarily dead. The following article is my effort to honor a few who have proved good guides to both myself and others.

The conqueror of inertia: William Carey (1761–1835)

In the history of the modern missionary movement, there was a point when an age of lethargy ended and action began. That point was in 1792 when William Carey published *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens.* The booklet might have been of no lasting impact if Carey had not gone out as a missionary to Bengal in Northern India in 1793, but the inescapable reality is that the facts which filled the book also filled his heart and literally impelled him to carry the gospel message to the heart of the non-Christian world. Where did that impulse come from?
We all know that you cannot judge a local people. Fuller wrote a brief keep sharing the gospel in a manner he was daily reminded of the need to educate himself in “learned languages, science, history, composition, &c.,” while making great efforts to self-educate himself in “learned languages, science, history, composition, &c.,” he was daily reminded of the need to keep sharing the gospel in a manner that could be appropriated by the local people. Fuller wrote a brief memoir about Carey that described the development of his theological views.

I have heard him say, that he did not recollect to have received his views of divine truth from any writer or preacher, but merely from reading his Bible; but that, when he found a number of brethren whose sentiments and feelings accorded with his own, it yielded him great satisfaction. The writings of president Edwards were afterwards of much use to him; and he drank in the leading principles of that great writer with approbation and delight.

We all know that you cannot judge a book by its cover, but you can learn quite a bit about people by the books that they read and the authors they admire. Carey’s reading of Jonathan Edwards helped shape him into the man he became. It was in my search for wisdom from Carey that I discovered how much modern missions owes to Edwards.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

The greatest guide that the American Colonies, and perhaps the North American continent, ever produced was Jonathan Edwards. He was instrumental in directing evangelical Christians to the ends of the earth with the gospel because of his ability to make biblical prophecy make sense to his readers. Through his writings, he convinced others that it was God’s intent that the gospel should be proclaimed throughout the earth, and that Christians were to use divinely instituted means to participate in this work of God. This theology was not his own creation. The stream that watered his spiritual life flowed first through the Puritans. What he did exceptionally well was to help clear from that stream some of the intellectual logjams that were in danger of blocking its flow.

In 1739, when evangelical Christianity was still a great rarity, Edwards preached a series of sermons in a rural church which eventually grew into a book called the History of the Work of Redemption. These sermons trace God’s purposes as they are revealed in the Scriptures and unfolded in history from before creation “until that time when all the church shall enter with Christ, their glorious Lord, into the highest heaven, and there shall enter on the state of their highest and eternal blessedness and glory.”

In enumerating the reasons why God would reveal his designs to man, he states, “it is fit that mankind should be informed something of God’s design in the government of the world, because they are made capable of actively falling in with that design, and promoting of it, and acting herein as his friends and subjects.” Thus the study of prophecy in regard to God’s work of redemption was the means by which God’s friends and subjects could intentionally promote God’s designs.

This idea became more evident in An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Christ’s Kingdom on Earth Pursuant to Scripture Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Time, which Edwards wrote in 1746. Here, Edwards interpreted how Zechariah 8:20–23 is to be understood and then showed how it ought to be applied.

We may learn from the tenor of this prophecy, together with the context, that this union in such prayer is foretold as a becoming and happy thing, and that which would be acceptable to God, and attended with glorious success.

From the whole we may infer, that it is a very suitable thing, and well pleasing to God, for many people, in different parts of the world, by express agreement, to come into a visible union in extraordinary, speedy, fervent and constant prayer, for those great effusions of the Holy Spirit, which shall bring on that advancement of Christ’s church and kingdom, that God has so often promised shall be in the latter ages of the world.

And so from hence I would infer the duty of God’s people, with regard to the memorial lately sent over into America, from Scotland, by a number of ministers there, proposing a method for such an union as has been spoken of, in extraordinary prayer for this great mercy.

The greatest guide that the American Colonies, and perhaps the North American continent, ever produced was Jonathan Edwards.
Edwards, in his writing and preaching, followed the activist Reformed tradition in an age when Christianity appeared to be declining. Rather than seek to protect the remnant, he forcefully expressed what many of his fellow ministers of the gospel believed, namely that those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit are called to be the chosen instruments of God for God's worldwide work of redemption.

His *Humble Attempt* was not a personal initiative. He wrote to support the efforts of Christians in Scotland to promote united prayer for revival and advancement of Christ's kingdom. A visionary guide need not have a new vision. A vision as old as the Bible is sufficient. Edwards focused the eyes of God's people on the divinely revealed vision so as to convince them that it was true and not a mirage. Then he immediately followed through with a clearly stated objective which was a logical inference from the vision itself, namely that Christians were to unite in extraordinary prayer for that outpouring of the Spirit which he showed from prophecy to be the appointed prerequisite for the fulfillment of the vision.

One remarkable aspect of this work is just how much of it is consumed with the interpretation of the book of Revelation. Though some Christians doubted that it was the time to pray for revival and extension of God's kingdom, Edwards proposed that an outpouring of the Holy Spirit was a legitimate object of prayer at that very time. Here it was felt necessary to refute or at least mitigate the claims of Moses Lowman who had published a book in 1745 which claimed that the Seventh Vial of Revelation represented an age that would only end in 2016.

While Edwards offered an alternative interpretation on the prophecies, he also tempered his remarks by pointing out that the church should still pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit at that very time, even if the Millennium would only begin two centuries later. Referring to the stream that flows from the Temple and gradually becomes a river in Ezekiel 47, Edwards writes:

> If the Spirit of God should be immediately poured out, and that work of God's power and grace should now begin, which in its progress and issue should complete this glorious effect; there must be an amazing and unparalleled progress of the work and manifestation of divine power to bring so much to pass, by the year two thousand.  

In the *History of the Work of Redemption*, Edwards's views are similarly expressed.

Edwards presented this life of a missionary to the American Indians, as an example of the power of God to transform the life of his servant and through him to bring the gospel to bear on the most pagan and uncivilized society with great and lasting effect. It became the inspiration of countless missionaries who carried the gospel throughout the world.

Through his writings, Edwards became a guide who led God's people into the future that God had pre-ordained for them. He had no authoritative power and he had no influence beyond that which he had accrued as a faithful minister of the gospel and interpreter of the divine oracles. His preached sermons in Northampton, Massachusetts touched several thousand people in his day, but what he wrote has influenced millions over the centuries.

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Let us move on to see specifically how Edwards’s works impacted others. Consider just his *Humble Attempt*. At first the book’s influence was relatively small. The decades following Edwards’s death in 1758 were not noted for church growth and expansion. But in 1786, an English Baptist, John Sutcliff of Olney, republished Edwards’s *Humble Attempt* and once again called on Christians to join together in extraordinary prayer for revival and the advancement of God’s kingdom. The call was heeded and the movement of prayer spread among the Baptists and beyond.

A close associate of John Sutcliff was William Carey. Once one realizes the connection between Edwards and Carey, it quickly becomes apparent that an *Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* was in many ways a sequel to Edwards’s *Humble Attempt*. His expectation of how the gospel would impact even the most savage society was expressed clearly in the *Enquiry*.

After all, the uncivilized state of the heathen, instead of affording an objection against preaching the gospel to them, ought to furnish an argument for it. Can we as men, or as Christians [sic], hear that a great part of our fellow creatures, whose souls are as immortal as ours, and who are as capable as ourselves, of adorning the gospel, and contributing by their preaching, writings, or practices to the glory of our Redeemer’s name, and the good of his church, are involved in ignorance and barbarism? Can we hear that they are without the gospel, without government, without laws, and without arts, and sciences; and not exert ourselves to introduce amongst them the sentiments of men, and of Christians? Would not the spread of the gospel be the most effectual mean of their civilization? Would not that make them useful members of society? We know that such effects did in a measure follow the afore-mentioned efforts of Elliot, Brainerd, and others amongst the American Indians; and if similar attempts were made in other parts of the world, and succeeded with a divine blessing (which we have every reason to think they would) might we not expect to see able Divines, or read well-conducted treatises in defence of the truth, even amongst those who at present seem to be scarcely human?

When Carey sailed for India in 1793 he brought the sermons of Edwards to read along the way. It is often noted that Carey spent seven years in India before baptizing his first convert in 1800. It is not as often remarked that the first convert preached continually for the next twenty-two years throughout Bengal and even to Assam and the foothills of the Himalayas. By 1803, with the New Testament published and Old Testament translated, Carey could write in a letter to Mr. Sutcliff:

> The Lord has blessed us with twenty-five native church members, who are all baptized on a profession of their faith. They do not all afford us equal pleasure, and we have been under the necessity of suspending some from communion for a time. Yet, with all their imperfections, they are our glory and joy.

Carey worked in unison with other missionaries who shared his theological and missiological convictions. In 1805 they wrote “The Serampore Agreement” which stated how they were to work together for the conversion of the heathen. It includes this reference to David Brainerd that should inspire modern missionaries to persevere in their work.

Let us often look at Brainerd, in the woods of America, pouring out his very soul before God for the perishing heathen, without whose salvation nothing could make him happy. Prayer, secret, fervent, believing prayer, lies at the root of all personal godliness. A competent knowledge of the languages current where a missionary lives, a mild and winning temper, and a heart given up to God in closet religion, these, these are the attainments which, more than all knowledge, or all other gifts, will fit us to become the instruments of God in the great work of Human Redemption.

By 1814, approximately 1100 converts had been baptized, Carey’s tenacity, which was equally evident in the lives of other pioneers like Adoniram Judson and Robert Morrison, stemmed from the theological principles laid out by Edwards. There was urgency without hastiness, confidence without triumphalism, and expectant perseverance in the midst of both opposition and indifference.
Robert Morrison’s prayer chain

Another example of the influence of Edwards in his promotion of a union of prayer is to be found in the journals of the first Protestant missionary to China, Robert Morrison. In December 1826 he wrote to his wife,

To-morrow, being the first Monday in the month, we propose meeting for Missionary prayers – O. is pleased with the idea of a chain of such meetings going on round the world. Not a simultaneous prayer-meeting, (some of our friends at home mistake this matter,) but a consecutive series. Perhaps, in the circle, we in China should begin; as the sun of Jih-pun [Japan], literally, the ‘source of day,’ first rises on us.21

The following entry continues:

“It is now about ten, P.M. – Our friends, with Johnny [his son] and myself assembled about eight to read the Scriptures, and pray for the conversion of the heathen, and the restoration of the Jews. It is the first monthly-prayer meeting that was ever held (I believe) in China. May such meetings never cease till China be evangelized!”20

Then on 5 November 1827 he records:

This evening we purpose to have a missionary prayer meeting. If they begin in the South Seas, we follow here in China – then India, Syria, and Europe, – America comes last. A chain of prayer all round the world, for twenty-four hours!21

Thus we see that eighty years after Edwards wrote An Humble Attempt, there was still a concerted effort to maintain the union of prayer in line with its original purposes.

The impact of Edwards

Jonathan Edwards took the theology of the Puritans and adapted it to an age when Western society was generally indifferent to the divine claims of Jesus Christ. He, like John Wesley, was a formulator of what was to become Evangelicalism. Unlike Wesley, Edwards left no institution to preserve and promulgate his views. What he did leave was books and admirers. Those books were read, distributed, printed, and reprinted so as to affect the views of a century of Christian leaders, many of whom became missionaries or advocates of missions.

The advocates of world missions believed that their labors in the Lord were not in vain. Yet they readily acknowledged that it was highly improbable that they would personally see the completion of the work which they began. They did, however, base their work on a number of time-honored principles and practices.

• Their faith was built on the Bible. They would translate the Bible and establish printing houses.
• They read their Bibles from the time they were children. They would teach adults to read and start schools wherever they preached the gospel.
• They generally were gradually converted after hearing much preaching. They would preach the gospel continuously and equip and encourage believers to do so also until people believed.
• They came from churches where they had been taught to use their minds to their full capacity. They would empower their disciples to do likewise.
• They gained their deep rooted theological convictions that carried them to the ends of the earth and kept them there by reading and taking to heart solid theological teaching. They would make suitable scholarly writings available to their converts.
• They usually benefited from attending Christian institutes. They would create institutions of higher education for emerging leaders.

To put it simply, those who participated in the early stages of the modern missionary movement sought to love their neighbors as they loved themselves. They did so in line with the guidance they had received from the writings of men like Edwards.

Conclusion

In 1979, as a very young Christian, I was working on a farm in Iowa. My neighbors, the Masters, took me to church every Sunday morning and evening. I soon discovered that Dwight Masters had a brother, Phil Masters, who had been martyred in Irian Jaya a decade earlier. They lent me the book Lords of the Earth, which told something of his story.22 Thus it was that the first missionary I ever got to know was a dead one. That summer I offered my life to God for missionary service. Four years later I was back on the farm cutting brush around the remains of the old farm house when I discovered
some gravestones. One small stone had words to this effect, “Philip Masters 1932–1968 … Hebr. 11:4.” Pulling out my pocket Bible I found the verse, “he being dead yet speaketh.” Phil Masters, whom I never met, speaks to me to this day.

The dead speak to God continually from under the altar, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Rev 6:10). But these departed saints only speak for a short time to the living—unless their stories are recorded for posterity. A spoken word is like a stone thrown into the pond. The ripples may spread, but they will disappear and the waters will become still and torpid once again. The recorded word is like the rain coming down from that vast cloud of witnesses that will not allow that grave-like slumber to reign. MRT

Endnotes
1 Pseudonym.
4 Carey, Memoir, 45. Fuller’s Memoir which only covered William Carey’s early life is recorded in part in Eustace Carey’s later Memoir.
12 Jonathan Edwards, An Account of the Life of the Late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd (Boston: D. Henchman, 1749).
14 Carey, An Enquiry, 69–70.
15 Carey, Memoir, 73.
16 Carey, Memoir, 312–3.
20 Morrison, Memoirs, 382.
21 Morrison, Memoirs, 382.
22 Don Richardson, Lords of the Earth (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 1977), 368.
Keeping Spiritually Fit on the Missionary Journey
An Interview with David Burke

David Burke
David Burke’s journey started in Australia with his father who was a pastor, his mother who was a missionary in widowhood, and a brother and sister who served in missions. After a journey to personal faith in Christ, his feet were set to pastoral and educational ministry in Australia and Singapore, with ongoing global ministry in the majority world. His best earthly travelling companions are Glenda, their children and grandchildren, and the friends who stick. He presently teaches at Christ College in Sydney, Australia. (dburke@christcollege.edu.au)

It is widely recognized that the concept of journey is a powerful metaphor for the Christian life. What do you see as the most important guide that will keep us spiritually fit throughout this journey?

Clearly, our most important guide is God himself. Even so, we experience God’s guidance in a number of different ways throughout our lives. Sometimes he leads through explicit statements in his word. At other times he leads through conversations we hold with cherished friends or even random strangers. But while his guidance is often clear, most of us will encounter situations when life just doesn’t make sense, when what is expected fails to materialize.

For instance, Paul and Anne were late life missionaries who were sent to a large city in Africa straddling the boundary between two groups at war. One January, violence erupted and more than 1000 people were killed. Life changed. Fear and insecurity became the norm. Worse was to come. One morning Anne awoke in great pain. By evening she was dead. It was small consolation that her condition could not have been treated anywhere—she was gone.

How does one make sense of that kind of situation? What was God doing? Had Paul and Anne misread God’s will for them by entering a world of violence and death? Where could Paul find perspective after his wife’s death? Where could he find the deep wells of strength to sustain him so that he could remain on the mission field? The answer to Paul’s quest for meaning and perspective, of course, lies in God and the help that he provides.

How do we take hold of God’s help in times of confusion and pain?

The way God helps his people is sometimes called his means of grace. God himself is the origin and source of grace which overflows through Jesus and is applied to us by the Spirit. If he didn’t extend his favor to us we would receive it. The means of grace are the God-given channels by which we plug into the grace that saves, sustains, refreshes, and enables.

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never receive it. The means of grace are the God-given channels by which we plug into the grace that saves, sustains, refreshes, and enables. Of the means of grace that God gives, his written word, the disciplines of prayer and fasting, the gathering of the saints, and the sacraments stand out.

Our need for God’s word is as important as eating, as it provides our spiritual food for the day. Did you eat dinner last night? If so, what was it like? Was it a light snack or a sumptuous meal? Did you gobble it down or take time to enjoy every last morsel? Now, did you read your Bible yesterday? Was it just a quick snack or did you read slowly and deeply to discover what God wanted to say to you? By imbibing in God’s word we will find resources to keep us going through difficult times.

Psalm 1 is a very important passage in this regard, as it reminds us that we need to delve into God’s word. It speaks of a man who is blessed, both because he does not follow the way of the wicked and because he delights in the law—the word—of the Lord. His meditation on God’s word guides the course of his life. It’s not that he raises the Bible above God; he is so delighted in God that he wants to spend time learning from his word. It is simply impossible to love God but hate his word.

The blessed man of the psalm counters the problem that many Christian workers have of becoming weary of reading their Bibles due to over-exposure. This is especially true for those who regularly minister the word to others or who read only from a professional distance or who read only for others. We need to read the Bible always remembering who God is and of his works in creation and redemption. We need to rekindle our delight in him by rereading his love story to us.

We all agree that reading the Bible is important. How can we improve our reading skills so that we learn to love God more?

Notice what the man in Psalm 1 does. He meditates on God’s word day and night. Meditation is important. When you read the Bible, take your time and think deeply. Remember your lavish banquet of food. Read the passage aloud in different translations if necessary. Ask questions of the text. Seek answers, but be prepared to leave some questions hanging because the answers might evade you. Look at the text from different angles.

The psalmist’s reference to “day and night” gives good reason to read a passage in the morning, pray over it, and make notes about what it says. Think about it during the day, and write some more notes as you continue to pray about it. Don’t forget that 2 Timothy 3:15–17 tells us that Scripture is useful because it is God-breathed. It also tells us what to believe and corrects our behaviour.

If you really want to improve your reading of the Bible, you will need to cultivate that desire and take the time that is necessary to see it happen. As you read, be sure to engage your head, heart, and hands. What does a particular passage teach about God, his world, his word, his work, or myself? What beliefs or attitudes do I need to cultivate or correct? What behaviours must I start or stop doing? These are essential questions.

As you read the Bible, don’t forget that since God made use of many genres, you should vary the genres that you read. Since God provided long and short passages, you should read both. You may find that changing the translation will help you discover things you haven’t seen before. Reading aloud or writing a passage out by hand may help you stay alert. Adopting one of the many Bible-reading schemes that are available in print or online may prove helpful. You may also benefit by getting together with someone to share what you have learned and to maintain accountability.

If we delight in and meditate on God’s word often, it will be the spiritual food that sustains us amidst the circumstances we face in the Lord’s service.

Reading God’s word will clearly guide Christians along their way. What other means of grace will benefit missionaries in their work?

Missionaries are often surprised by just how difficult it is to live for God in cultures that are disinterested in Christianity. In many ways our experience parallels Daniel’s in Babylon where he lived a life of exile, dashed dreams, ethnic hostility, and a spiritually threatening environment. What’s your Babylon? Perhaps you live in a place where Christians are in the minority and where they are not accepted. Or it may be that, like me, you come from a country where the society’s response to Christianity is rapidly shifting from holding it in a quasi-establishment position to relegating it to a marginalized, merely tolerated, or perhaps openly harassed status. Whatever our circumstances, the Bible’s teaching about the place of prayer and fasting in Daniel’s life can be for us a means of grace.

Educated in the wisdom of Babylon, Daniel was slated to die with the wise men of the country when they were unable to tell King Nebuchadnezzar his dream and its interpretation. Wisely
Missionaries are often surprised by just how difficult it is to live for God in cultures that are disinterested in Christianity. In many ways our experience parallels Daniel’s in Babylon where he lived a life of exile, dashed dreams, ethnic hostility, and a spiritually threatening environment.

asking for time, he quickly gathered his friends-in-exile to pray that God would be merciful to them by revealing the dream. God’s positive response lead to continued life and praise (Dan 2:17–23). But Daniel’s prayer life was not merely stimulated by crisis. He had already formed a habit of regular prayer that he would not change, even in the face of death. When King Darius was tricked into proclaiming an edict that no one should petition anyone but the king for thirty days, Daniel ignored the threat of the lions’ den and continued to kneel down and pray three times a day (Dan 6:7–11).

In many ways, the purpose of prayer is obvious enough. As the common acronym ACTS spells out, in prayer we open our hearts before God in adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. But while we can and should approach God in these ways, Jesus teaches and models what could be understood as a more biblical approach to prayer. According to Jesus, frequent prayer should be a personal priority, but never done for public display (Mark 1:35–36; Matt 6:5–6). It should rather be known for conciseness of words and accompanied by acts performed out of true piety. Is this true of your prayer life? Do you pray much or neglect much? What is the depth of your prayer life? For sure, prayer is hard work. Do you schedule time for it? Do you focus on it? Do you determine the right words to use as you approach God? For me, the biggest barrier to prayer is that it demeans the proud, self-sufficient rebel that is in me and that really doesn’t want to turn to God.

It is hard to think of ourselves as rebels who don’t want to pray. Can you give us any practical advice that will help us improve as people of prayer?

A good starting place would be to remember Jesus’ instruction to pray to the Father in secret. This means that we must make space for prayer. The right place, the right surroundings is essential. This means that we need to turn off all devices that might distract us from this greater thing. And if space is important, so is time. Many would benefit from scheduling prayer in their diary and keeping their appointment. Others will find that a routine, such as walking to work, provides the right place and time. Whatever method we use, it is essential that we are intentional in our time and place for prayer.

While the ACTS approach to prayer is useful, many people need to relegate personal supplication to the very last place lest their prayers uncover natural, selfish tendencies. This reminds us to turn to the Bible as a stimulus for prayer and a guide that teaches us how to pray. The Psalms and the Lord’s Prayer are a special help. As Jesus told us to pray to “Our Father,” we should think of prayer in the same way we think of the pleasure we receive when talking to our father or best friend. Prayer should never be a burden with a list of daily to-dos that need to be ticked off. It should be a delight that we can spend time with God, our maker, redeemer, and friend. There is much wisdom in the old adage that prayer is friendship with God.

You have said a good deal about prayer, but what about fasting? This is a discipline that many of us have to admit that we do not practice often or well.

While we often think of fasting in terms of not eating, it may be better to think of it as giving up something we are free to do, but choose not to do. While Jesus proclaimed all food clean, we may give up certain foods for a time or for life. The same could be said for the beverages we drink, the length of time we sleep, or even of a married couple abstaining from sexual relationship for a period (1 Cor 7). All of these are forms of fasting.

The Bible gives several reasons for fasting. One is so that we can dedicate ourselves to prayer. Another is so that...
we can train ourselves in self-denial (1 Cor 6:12). Though our age encourages us to say “yes” to all our desires, fasting is a way of saying “no” to them and to free us to serve the Lord and his people. Fasting is thus a way to put one good thing aside to make room for something that is better.

We see this in the book of Daniel. It is interesting to find that when Daniel was sent into exile he was willing to adopt many things from Babylonian culture—accepting a Babylonian name, clothes, language, and education. Even so, he refused to “defile himself with the king’s food” or wine. Why? Some have suggested that his refusal relates to health or sanitation issues, or that the food had been sacrificed to idols, or that the diet broke Mosaic food laws. It is also possible to see it as Daniel’s attempt to draw a line over which he wouldn’t pass. While he accepted many aspects of Babylonian culture, he remained the Lord’s man. Restricting himself to a diet of vegetables and water fits the qualities of fasting we have already mentioned—Daniel denied himself things that he could have eaten in order to preserve his identity as God’s man, both to himself and the Babylonians. It was a voluntary boundary that marked him out as different.

What marks us out as God’s people? What things are permissible for us but we choose not to do in order to set boundaries that demonstrate our identity?

The Bible provides several guiding principles regarding fasting. (1) It is not for public display (Matt 6:16–18). (2) It is not an addition to faith that brings us to a higher spiritual level (Col 2:16–17; 1 Tim 4:1–5). (3) There is a point where self-denial collapses into self-indulgence (1 Cor 7:5). It is thus right to end most fasts. (4) True fasting isn’t an end in itself but a means to living a life of practical godliness (Isa 58).

**Fasting is … a way to put one good thing aside to make room for something that is better.**

**Are reading God’s word and spending time in prayer and fasting things that we should do on our own or that we should do with others?**

This is clearly a both/and proposition. We need to do it on our own and with others. When God starts us out in our spiritual journey, he places us in the context of the church—the people of God. The problem is, we do not always find that other Christians approach these and other issues in the same way we do. This can be frustrating, as the very people God wants us to work with are often the ones we find most difficult to work with.

Let me illustrate this. John and his wife June went as young missionaries to teach in a Bible college. An older missionary had wisely told them that there is often “one thing” that is a sticking point in ministry. For June, it was isolation. She missed being with her peers. For John, it was loss of control. Decision-making in the mission college was chaotic and his plans were often pushed aside by last minute decisions by a local church leader who had a different sense of time and punctuality. Another missionary couple on the same field came from a different culture and presented more challenges in relationships.

How do we relate to Christians whose way of looking at the world and working in it is puzzlingly different to our own? What do we do when fellow missionaries aggravate us and present challenges to our sanctification? What do we do when we realise that our own imperfections contribute to relationship problems on the field?

The story of Cinderella may be of help here. Do you remember how Cinderella’s stepmother and stepsisters responded to her? To them, she was a threat, an inconvenience. How did the Prince react? To him, she was a greatly desired treasure. You see, the way we see what we see shapes our thinking and actions. This is as true for the church as it is for fairy-tale princesses. What we see when we think about the church shapes how we act as members.

If we only see the church from below, two things may happen. First, we might see the church as a very earthly institution, an imperfect organization made up of imperfect people that needs to be replaced. And though the New Testament is realistic in its assessment that things are wrong in the church (e.g. 1 Corinthians and Revelation 2–3), this is not the whole picture. Second, we may view the church as a man-made organization that has lost its usefulness in today’s world and turn to new ways of coming together or focusing on private piety or turning to para-church organizations. This can be a touchy point for mission agencies, as the organization can easily replace the local church in our affections. By viewing the church from below, and apart from Christ, we can easily despise or dismiss it. This is a dangerous option that must be rejected.

Another dangerous option is found in many institutional churches. This is to focus more on the church than on Christ. It’s a problem of allowing a good thing to be ruined by putting it in the wrong place. The church is good. It was given to us by God to help us come to Christ, grow in Christ, and serve Christ. And that’s precisely the point. If we unite the connection between Christ and the church, all that is good is lost and replaced by the idolatry of substituting the church for Christ. While it is right to love the church and strive to be a good Christian, the bottom line is that we must always and only live in Christ and follow after Christ.
It is easy for many of us to say that the dangers you mention are the problems of others and not of ourselves. How can we examine our own actions to see our true understanding of the church?

Very simply, if we stay away from the church or talk it down, we show that we view it in isolation from Christ. And since the church is the body of Christ and since he is personally building it, this response leads us down a spiritual dead end. Similarly, if all we do is talk about the church and its growth, we show that we have elevated the church above Christ. But since Christ is the head of the church, the foundation of God’s holy temple, this is another spiritual dead end.

Let’s return to Cinderella, the story of a poor orphan who was treated as a grubby housemaid by her stepmother and stepisters, and yet became a princess-bride. Importantly, she becomes a princess-bride only because of the love of the prince. While this is just a fairy tale, the story of God’s love for the church, demonstrated through Jesus Christ, is infinitely more wonderful.

God’s love for Israel is sketched in Exodus 19 where we read that he took the initiative to bring them out of Egypt (19:4) and that if they would obey his voice and keep his covenant he would make them to be a treasured possession, kingdom of priests, and holy nation (19:5–6). The origin and nature of God’s people is based upon God himself. He chose them. Even so, they need to behave like God’s people in order to remain in close relationship with him.

This idea is reinforced in Deut 7:7–8 where we read that “It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors.” Though Israel had been nothing, God’s love made them a treasured possession and kingdom of priests.

These ideas are picked up in the New Testament and given a new twist in the light of Jesus. In 1 Peter 2:4–10, distinctly temple language is used to portray Jesus Christ as the cornerstone upon which the whole church is built (4), and the church as a spiritual house and holy priesthood that will offer spiritual sacrifices to God (5). Emphatically taking over Mosaic idiom, Peter envisions the church to be God’s chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, and treasured possession (9). Just like in the Old Testament, the emphasis is on God’s action. He lays the foundation of the church in Christ and he chooses the people so that they can become his people.

These, and other, New Testament images of the church honor its nature and emphasize its importance (cf. 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 2:19). The high point of the imagery is to recognize the church as bride (Rev 18:23; 19:7; 21:2, 9; 22:17; cf. Eph 5:22–33). Just like Cinderella, the church becomes the bride solely because God loved her and gave himself for her. For that reason, we should see and treat the church as he does.

What you have said gives us reason to acknowledge our co-workers as honorable because of Christ. That is different from saying that working with others is easy or that ministry is all about sharing the spiritual privileges we have received in Christ.

The spiritual privileges are there. When we are on the front line for the Great Commission, we can watch God’s glorious work whereby he calls his people from every tribe, nation, people, and language. We are also privileged to be part of a global partnership, working with fellow missionaries and a national church, and living in another culture.

But mission is not all about privilege. Only those who know little of field realities retain such a naive romanticism about missionary life. The downside includes isolation from one’s own culture, Christian networks, and family with all their joys and problems. These are all compounded by difficulties in language and cultural communication. More disorientation comes when we attempt to maintain an “in-between identity” that pretends we can live both in our country of service and keep up all ties in our homelands. Some experience a feeling of deprivation due to the lack of a proper water supply, electricity, and communication networks. On top of this there are dangers that impact security, health, finance, and the spiritual life. And if this is not enough, frustrations abound due to relationships, lack of results, our own limitations as creatures, and the Fall.

In the light of such difficulties, how can we maintain our zeal and focus as the years pass, as we grow tired, and our contribution seems pointless?

Our strength doesn’t come from who we are, where we have come from, the degrees we have earned, the languages we have learned, or even the work we have done. Our strength to face the challenges comes from the gospel. While it gives rise to many challenges, it is at the heart of our privileges and provides answers to our challenges. It is therefore good to remind ourselves regularly that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the source of the grace that comes from God and which is mediated by the means of grace we have been looking at. As we refresh ourselves in the gospel we gain right perspectives on our challenges, our hearts are strengthened by contemplating God’s great works in Christ, and we get a clear sense of the gospel priority amidst competing tasks.

One of the best summaries of the gospel is found in Romans 1:1–6. Here Paul writes that the gospel is “of God.” Since it belongs to him, we shouldn’t mess with it, but preach it as delivered to us. The gospel, he says, was promised beforehand in Scripture. This is a hermeneutical key that unlocks the Bible as a unified book proclaiming God’s grace. The gospel, Paul further tells us, is concerned with God’s Son. Jesus is not just the one who reveals the gospel, he is the gospel. His full humanity is proclaimed in the statement that he came according to the flesh. His full divinity is announced
when he is declared to be the Son of God. His power is demonstrated by his resurrection as he overcame death and brings us hope that we can too.

As Paul sees it, the gospel isn’t just “good news” that is to be listened to or even acknowledged intellectually; it is good news to be obeyed. That’s why he speaks of the obedience of faith. Faith is an act of obedience as we respond to the gospel. It is reckoning that the message is true. But faith also requires obedience. Obedience is thus an integral and necessary part of faith. While it is true that faith alone saves, faith never comes alone as it is always flanked by obedience.

The gospel is good news about God’s work in salvation. It is good news about the work of the Father who decided to save the world and sent his Son to save. It is good news of the Son who executed the Father’s plan. And it is good news of the Spirit who is sent by the Father and the Son to apply that gospel to human hearts and empower the church for gospel mission. The gospel has Jesus at its heart: Jesus sent, living, crucified, raised, ascended, reigning, and returning. This is our creed. This is good news for us and for the world.

Are there concrete ways in which we can live out this gospel call for obedience?

Very simply, we live out gospel obedience through our participation in the sacraments and worship. How is this seen? Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are called gospel ordinances because they preach the gospel to us. They are a visual embodiment of the gospel of Jesus. That is why we say that the sacraments are a means of grace.

Through baptism we act out the gospel’s proclamation of forgiveness and new life through the symbol of washing by water. Baptism also portrays God’s faithfulness and mercy because when we call out to confess our sin, repent, and show active faith in Jesus Christ, God gives us a new life (Matt 28:16–20).

The Lord’s Supper is a proclamation of “the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). Through it, we act out the gospel reality that everyone is under God’s judgment and needs salvation. We also engage the gospel truth that God provided the sufficient blood sacrifice that makes propitiation for sin—something we could never do for ourselves. In the breaking of bread, we receive the gospel hope that God has invited us to one day sit at his banquet table and partake of the great wedding feast of the Lamb. It is thus our declaration that we have a personal share in the resurrection to eternal life and of the coming restoration of the whole of creation in the new heavens and new earth.

And this gospel also frames our personal and spiritual journey as mission workers. Christ has ascended and is reigning in the heavens, but the fullness of his earthly kingdom yet awaits his return. This shapes the contours of our path. As creatures who exist in the aftermath of the Fall, we grow old, get tired, fall sick, and die. But as those who are chosen, called, and justified, our full sanctification awaits the resurrection transformation that will be revealed when Jesus returns and we are glorified. So, as we stride through our journey of faith, we, like Paul, may be afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down, but we do not lose heart because we see the reality that, all along the road, Jesus is behind us and with us through his Spirit and that he lies ahead of us in his return. Let us walk this way with him. MRT

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“As Paul sees it, the gospel isn’t just “good news” that is to be listened to or even acknowledged intellectually; it is good news to be obeyed.”
From Light Through Darkness into Hope

Angie Chang

Angie Chang is undergoing theological training. She served in rural and metropolitan Thailand for the past two years with OMF.

The woman’s screams pierced the dark night. The antiseptic smells of the hospital accentuated the patients’ fear of pain and death. Assigned to a bed in the corridor because the ward was overcrowded, Prajuap felt more lonely and scared than she’d ever felt in all her twenty-four years. It was more frightening than the time she kicked her alcoholic husband out of the house and was left with their two young sons.

She did not ask the woman why she was screaming though it did not make sense. Being a leprosy patient, the nerves in her arms and legs were so damaged that she could not possibly feel that much pain. Nonetheless, she screamed night after night. Prajuap found it physically and emotionally draining.

First light at Manorom

Trying to block out the screaming, Prajuap turned her thoughts to her early days of treatment. She had gone to Manorom Hospital in Chainat province upon being diagnosed with leprosy. After leaving her young children with their grandparents, she’d set out with her second brother on that long journey into the unknown. He had barely left the hospital when tears started rolling down her cheeks. Surrounded by a sea of strangers, Prajuap felt utterly alone and missed her children terribly. Days at the hospital felt unbearably long. There was no farming or chores to be done in Manorom. Since she stopped schooling at the tender age of nine, she had helped her parents in their rice fields in the province of Angthong—“Golden Basin”—so named because of its agricultural importance to the country. Prajuap had harboured hopes of studying for a few more years, but was not allowed to do so since she was a girl. Still, she was glad that she had learnt to read.

As the days dragged on, Prajuap started flipping through the leaflets left around the wards. The leaflets and the book they called the Bible were not exciting to read, unlike some of the Thai novels with heroes and heroines who engaged in thrilling adventures. Nonetheless, she read the leaflets since reading helped to distract her, to keep her from thinking about her children.

The literature on the foreigners’ religion talked about a man called Jesus whom they considered to be God! She had heard about Jesus in her hometown in the Wiset district. The white man, Doctor Albert, talked about Jesus and she listened out of politeness—after all, Christianity was a white man’s religion.

Time passed a little more quickly after she befriended some patients in the ward. One of the ladies soon started inviting her to the Christian meetings held after the doctors’ morning rounds. Day after day, that lady would come and ask, “Shall we go to the meeting today?” Prajuap was not keen to go, but felt embarrassed after the repeated invitations and finally rationalised that she had nothing to lose by going to the meetings. It turned out that the meetings enabled her to better understand the Christian literature she had read.

The more she listened, the more she understood what the foreigners’ God was like. She was surprised that he was a loving, personal God who helped sinful people, and unknowingly, she was drawn to him. She found she did not need any persuasion to continue attending the morning meetings.

Treatment and these meetings marked
her days until the screaming began to fill the night. Sleepless nights then became the norm.

**Challenge in the dark**

That particular night, the woman’s shrieks sounded louder. Prajuap could not sleep. Everybody was kept awake by the sounds of her screams and also by the fear of death that her screams evoked. Unable to bear another sleepless night, Prajuap wondered if the foreigners’ God could help her. They said that ordinary people could communicate directly with this God through prayer. She prayed in desperation and challenged God to prove himself real by giving her one night of peaceful sleep.

When Prajuap woke up the next morning, the other patients expressed their amazement that she had slept soundly through the night. They asked, “Did you not hear anything at all?” For the woman in the room had kept everybody awake—her screams were terrifying—right up to the moment she died. It was clear to Prajuap that the foreigners’ God was real. It was an undeniable answer to her prayer. She believed.

**Battle with darkness**

Life in the hospital meant being with friends, going to the morning Christian gatherings, and reading the Bible and books. About six months later, Prajuap was allowed to go home. Now, she could go home and be with her children—how she looked forward to that.

The problem was, the reception she received at home was not what she’d expected. Her parents cried in shock when they saw her, saying that it looked like she had been roasted over fire. Otherwise, how could her skin be darkened to such an extent? Even though being dark was not considered beautiful in the sight of Thais, Prajuap was thankful for the B63 medicine. Though it caused the darkening, it also gradually rid her body of the dreadful disease.

But darker clouds were soon to descend. One day, while her elder son was playing by the pier after school, he fell into the water and drowned. Burying this child deepened Prajuap’s sense of loss as it restored the painful memory of burying her second child, a baby girl, seven days after birth.

The family arranged for a Buddhist funeral. Prajuap allowed her sister to perform the Buddhist rites in her stead. She was the mother, but she was also a child of God and felt it wasn’t right for her, as a believer, to take part in the ceremonies. None of the Christians had said anything to her, but she did not want the village community to see her being involved in Buddhist rites. But deep down, questions swirled in her head. Why did this happen? Why didn’t God help her child who was only nine? Didn’t he have the power to protect the child? Prajuap blamed God and became resentful.

The pain lingered. But even as she pondered about her little one’s death, Prajuap was reminded about what she had heard at Manorom Hospital—about God the Creator who made everything and how everything belongs to him. Her wrestling stopped when she acknowledged that he had the right to give and take away everything, including her son. She gave thanks that she still had her youngest son, Panpan, and vowed to bring him up in the way of the Lord. Her submission and trust in the supreme Creator God anchored her faith in the Lord.

**Provisions most unexpected**

After her son’s death, Prajuap was in and out of Manorom Hospital for a number of years. Gradually, the hospital and the Christian community of patients and medical staff, including members of the nearby Manorom Church, became an integral part of her life—her family away from home. It was during this time that she met Chart, a fellow leprosy patient. His hands and feet were deformed by the dreaded disease, but he had a heart of gold and loved God deeply. God’s provision of a family for Prajuap at Manorom went beyond all that she could have imagined. Later, when Chart met her father and brother to ask for her hand in marriage, they were so concerned that Chart would not be able to take care of her that they asked if she could do without the marriage. Still, they respected her decision to go ahead with the marriage and they came to appreciate Chart and his quiet and unassuming ways. Years later, even Panpan told her that she had chosen the right man.

The provision and care that God showered on Prajuap were seen in not only the big things in life, but also the ordinary day-to-day concerns. During her treatment at Manorom, Prajuap would lend her hand in small chores around the hospital. Through these, God sometimes provided for her. Though small in amount—sometimes five or eight Baht—these unexpected sums and other gifts from unknown sources were lessons in prayer, teaching her that she did not need to chase after money or request for help from others. Through these personal experiences of provision, Prajuap saw the love of God and his faithfulness in keeping his promises to look after the poor, like herself.

**Sunset in Wiset**

In time, Prajuap took on a job helping in the Operating Theatre at Manorom Hospital. The years flew by. Upon retirement she returned to her hometown in Wiset. Her family had fields and her second brother, who was a military man, enlisted her to help in...
his chicken business.

A young pastor called Sakchay came, hoping to start a church in the district. Housing was not to be found easily, so Prajuap offered him a room in her house with Chart and took care of him like a son. She also hoped he could plant a church in Wiset. Sakchay got married and, after about two years, returned to Nan province because the handful of believers in Wiset could not support him and his growing family.

After Sakchay left, another Thai pastor from the provincial city occasionally visited the Christians in Wiset. Sakchay got married and, after about two years, returned to Nan province because the handful of believers in Wiset could not support him and his growing family.

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Amidst the coming and going of these pastors and missionaries and the accompanying hopes and disappointments, remaining steadfast would have been difficult had Prajuap not had a few faithful ones with whom she could journey. Besides Chart, Prajuap had a faithful friend, Young, who lived in the adjoining district and came to join the Christian meetings held regularly at Prajuap’s home. Living within shouting distance, Meng and her husband completed this small faithful band that met regularly to read the Bible and to pray. Meng had met her husband whilst receiving treatment at Manorom, and had moved to Wiset as Prajuap’s tenant after their retirement.

Holding on in hope

The group of five shrank after Chart and Meng’s husband passed on. Looking back at the seventy-six years of her life, Prajuap is grateful. Even so, there is an ache in her heart. The two whom she loves the most—Panpan and his daughter, whom Prajuap had cared for since infancy—still do not know the Lord. Panpan loves the attractions of the world too much. And though she tried to bring her teenage granddaughter to church, the young girl’s heart seemed unmoved.

“When, O Lord, will you bring them into your Kingdom?” As she gazes into the fields, Prajuap wonders if she will see the day when her family comes to faith in Jesus. Hope returned to her heart as Prajuap recalled how the Lord Jesus has proven himself real in the more than half a century that she has known him. He had been there in her pain at Manorom Hospital. He had healed her deep, invisible wounds after the death of her elder son. He had brought her love and joy with a new family and friends. He had fed her spiritually through the years in the Christian community at Manorom and with the small, faithful band in Wiset. She had seen the power of prayer, and she knows that answers come not by human might. Since God goes with her, she will look to him to work everything according to his will and in his good time. MRT

Editor’s note:

This story is based on an interview that Angie carried out with a lady in central Thailand who has been a believer for many years. Names have been changed in the story.

The interview is part of a research project intended for all of the OMF Fields which seeks to learn from long-time believers. The questions cover various stages of the believer’s journey: the journey to faith, the journey through the ups and downs of life, and the interaction of one’s faith with local culture. The research specifically targets people who have been Christians for more than twenty years, have been faithful in their walk, but are not pastors or employed as Christian workers. We hope to learn lessons from these believers that will help in the discipleship of others from that culture and to discern common issues faced across the region where OMF works. If you are interested in taking part in this research, please contact Claire McConnell at claire.mcconnell@omfmail.com.
“Jesus, Crowned with Glory and Honour”¹

As I was coming to this meeting this afternoon one verse of Scripture was persistently suggested to my mind, namely:—“We see Jesus crowned with glory and honour.” It has been my privilege, during the past ten years, in the city of Hweichow in South Anhwei, to “see Jesus crowned with glory and honour” in the lives of many Chinese Christians. And I should like to tell you this afternoon about the conversion, the service, and the death, of one or two of these Christians.

Mr. Lee, the B.A.

Some thirty miles to the west of our City there is a village, the inhabitants of which are mostly called by the name of Lee. The head of the village, or, at any rate, one of the most important men in the village, was a scholar, a B.A. He was a very wealthy man, and was engaged in the tea trade. Let me tell you very briefly of his conversion. One morning this Mr. Lee was standing by his door when one of our evangelists, Mr. Yao, by name, visited the village, carrying with him the Gospel. After some conversation with Mr. Lee, the evangelist sold him a Gospel of Mark. Mr. Lee took the Gospel home, and there read it and reread it. Soon afterwards he set out for our nearest out-station to learn more of what this Gospel really contained; for there were many things in it he did not understand.

He arrived at our little out-station about ten o’clock one Saturday night, and Mr. Yao, who had been out on an itinerant journey, arrived soon afterwards. They talked together of what he had read from the Gospel of Mark. The next day, Sunday, one of the missionaries from Hweichow was present to preach. During that service Mr. Lee realized that he was a sinner, and he came, with all his sins, to the Cross of Jesus Christ, and trusted Him fully. Not long afterwards he came to our city and spent a short time studying God’s Word with us. We were holding a Conference, and never shall I forget those days. Mr. Lee spent the greater part of the time at his disposal, with his Bible; rising up long before daylight, and spending each evening, studying the Word. How quickly he got to know Christ, and how greatly he loved the Lord! Immediately on his return home he began preaching the Gospel throughout his district.

Many villages were visited, oftentimes in company with other Christians, and with the evangelists. I have been with him myself. He was an earnest worker for Christ, and a great student of God’s Word, and extremely fond of prayer. Often have I learnt a lesson from Mr. Lee as he knelt in prayer. How simply, how humbly, how perseveringly, he came to Christ in prayer for the villages, and the cities, we were visiting together. And how fully assured he was that the Lord would answer his prayers.

In one of those journeys he caught a very severe cold. As soon as I heard of his illness I sent our evangelist to enquire, and, afterwards, went myself to see him. His disease developed into something like consumption. As he lay on his death-bed he wrote me a letter, thanking me for all the blessing I had been to him—but, oh, beloved friends, he was a greater blessing to me than I had ever been to him. In concluding his letter, he wrote: “Enclosed you will find a cheque for $500 with which I desire you build a little hall to the praise of Hweichow in South Anhwei, to “see Jesus crowned with glory and honour” in the lives of many Chinese Christians. And I should like to tell you this afternoon about the conversion, the service, and the death, of one or two of these Christians.1

George W. Gibb
Born in Aberdeen in 1869, George trained as a teacher before going to Anhwei province in the Autumn of 1894. There, in December 1896, he married Margaret Emslie, also from Aberdeen, who had gone to China in 1892. After twenty years of service he became the Superintendent for the area. He joined the China Administration in 1918, becoming Deputy China Director in 1922 and China Director in 1931. His appointment as General Director in August 1935 “came about as the natural outcome of the past, being welcomed by all the Directors.”² A year after taking up this office Margaret Emslie died following years of ill health. One year later he married Eleanor Kendal, a teacher at Chefoo. His own health had been under great strain over these years and it was from his sickbed in 1940 that he handed over the office to Bishop Houghton. A short time later he fell asleep. D. E. Hoste gave the following tribute. “He approved himself amongst us as a wise and patient leader, a kind and faithful friend, and an exemplar of self-sacrificing devotion to the work of the Gospel.”³

¹ See Jesus crowned with glory and honour.
² “Mission Round Table 11:2 (May–August 2016): 30–31.”
³ “Mission Round Table 11:2 (May–August 2016): 30–31.”
Often have I learnt a lesson from Mr. Lee as he knelt in prayer. How simply, how humbly, how perseveringly, he came to Christ in prayer for the villages, and the cities, we were visiting together. And how fully assured he was that the Lord would answer his prayers.

Mr. Shao, the scholar

To the south of Hweichow, amongst the hills, is another little village. The people who dwell there are most of them called Shao. One of our colporteurs visited that village three years ago, and preached Christ there, and one gentleman, another scholar, welcomed the Word preached. After he had received God's Word this Mr. Shao would gather together the people of the village and tell them what he himself had learned from the Word of God. He came to one of our Conferences, the Conference we held just before I left for home—and my colleague, Mr. Mead, and myself were both impressed with the knowledge this man had of the Scriptures. It was evident that he had spent a great deal of time studying them. Whether he is converted or not I cannot say, but I tell you the incident in order to solicit your prayers for this man.

The light was brought to him wholly by the work of a colporteur. How much we need to pray for these colporteurs, and for the important work they are doing, that the Word of the Lord, as it is scattered broadcast, may find an entrance into the hearts of those who read it, and bring forth fruit to the eternal praise and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord has done, and is doing, marvellous things in Hweichow district. The missionary whom I left there in charge writes me of one gentleman, also a scholar, who has spent $200 in Buddhist literature, and read the whole of it in order to find peace, but found none. He was an earnest seeker after God and after the truth. At last he found his way to our little hall in Hweichow, and Mr. Mead tells me that he has spent quite a few days with this man, studying God's Word, and it seems as if he is not far from the Kingdom. Mr. Mead ends his letter thus: “Being in very comfortable circumstances, he is able to spend a good deal of time in reading, and he is now, I believe, giving all his time to Bible study. Please, join us in prayer for him.”

I ask you to pray for us, to pray for this man, to pray for our helpers, our colporteurs, our Biblewomen, our evangelists, that they may be filled with God's Holy Spirit, and may be constrained by the love of Jesus Christ to go forward and preach amongst their own countrymen, of whom there are over 2,000,000 in our district. As I think of these villages, and remember that they have only been once or twice visited, my heart is almost downcast. We need many more workers; we cannot ourselves overtake the work. And I would ask you, dear friends, to do your best for us. I know you do pray for us, and I know that oftentimes we are blessed because of your prayers. Pray on, that the Lord Jesus Christ may indeed be “crowned with glory and honour” in the salvation of many souls throughout the district of Hweichow and throughout the province of Anhwei.

In closing, let me ask one question of the many young people here. In view of the open doors, and the great opportunities that lie before us, in view of the cry that comes from the darkness of heathenism, “come over and help us!” in view of the last request, nay, the emphatic command, of our risen Lord Jesus “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel,”—what, dear friends, will you do? What answer will you give? O may it be that from the midst of this gathering someone will say “Here am I, send me.”

Endnotes

1 Originally published in China’s Millions, British ed. [June 1912]: 93–4.
3 Hoste, “George W. Gibb.” 22.
Journey Outside the Invisible Wall

Jojie Wong has been serving as a missions mobilizer with the Philippine Home Council of OMF since 2000. She has an MDiv in Biblical Studies (Singapore Bible College) and an MA in Global Missions (Redcliffe College, UK). She is currently in SBC’s Doctor of Ministry program.

The invisible walls

Growing up in the far south of the Philippines means living in a multicultural context. I am Filipino-Chinese (that is, a Philippine-born Chinese) and my family speaks a Cantonese sub-dialect, making us a minority compared with the Hokkien-speaking Filipino-Chinese. I learned the local Cebuano dialect since that was the lingua franca of the area. My family owned an electronic parts store frequented by Filipino-Cebuanos. Once in a while, a Muslim would drop by. Often we would chase off tribal people who came down from the hills to trade. We would occasionally stare at the blond-haired, blue-eyed “Amerikano” as he picked up something at our store.

One might assume that after I became a Christian in college, I would have developed a burden to share the gospel with the people around me—differences in culture or race notwithstanding. Interestingly, many of these people remained “invisible” to me where the gospel was concerned. My priority was sharing the gospel with my family and friends—perhaps understandably so, as we tend to care more for the salvation of those we have a relationship with than those we don’t.

But that led me to an important question. Why didn’t I have a relationship with people from the other ethnic groups that I saw so frequently? Why didn’t it occur to me that these people also need Jesus? It was only much later, as I grew in my walk with Christ, that I realized that I had grown up inside an invisible wall—just like every other ethnic group within my context. We could all live in the same city—Muslims, Chinese, tribal people, and Christians—and still be so clueless about each other and uninterested in each other’s needs.

The longer I serve as a missions mobilizer, the more evident the invisible wall is to me. Churches in the middle of a Muslim majority area meet regularly but don’t reach out to their Muslim neighbors. Christians on tours to Buddhist lands show appreciation for the architecture of temples but don’t quite understand its spiritual significance. A Christian who belongs to a church known for solid preaching made this remark on her feedback form after our mission awareness event: “I didn’t know there are still people who have never heard of the gospel!”

But being able to see that one lives inside the invisible wall is itself a journey of realization. It doesn’t happen overnight, and it does not happen unless God brings certain situations or people into our lives.
Venturing outside the invisible wall

A few years after university, I found myself working in an Indo-Chinese refugee camp in the northern Philippines. This was another multicultural environment where I worked (and lived) alongside Filipinos from all over and expats from the U.S., Europe, and other Asian countries. I served Indo-Chinese refugees who came through: Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians. Sometimes Hmongs came through and, on rare occasions, even the hunted Montagnards as well.

Having left the invisible wall in Davao, I somehow ended up not building new invisible walls at the refugee camp. Perhaps this was partly caused by a spiritual “growth spurt” I experienced in the refugee camp where I could sense God’s heart a little more deeply.

I didn’t realize it then, but those three years working in the refugee camp were part of God’s process of mobilizing me. He slowly dismantled the invisible walls and gently pushed me to venture out and interact with peoples very different from me in many ways. As I engaged with these peoples, my curiosity about them slowly turned into a burden for their souls.

At that point, I knew next to nothing about missions or missionaries. The little I did know never gave me reason to think it had anything to do with me.

Things changed when I went back home to Davao and served in what would later be my sending church. The senior pastor had a burden for missions and it somehow rubbed off on me. I helped him promote missions in the church and when the missionaries supported by the church came through, I also helped to take care of them. Then during one of our church missions weeks, a visiting speaker did an exposition of Isaiah 49. It spoke to the situation and the struggles I was facing at that point in my life. Verse 6, in particular, brought home the point for me.

“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

It not only helped me see beyond my struggles in ministry, it also gave me direction. Just as the Messiah desired that his salvation be extended beyond the Jews, my role in his kingdom work is to go beyond my own people. I realized that I can and must be a part of seeing the Messiah’s salvation “reach to the ends of the earth.”

And so began my journey into missions engagement.

Early life outside the invisible wall

The default questions most Christians ask when they realize that God has called them to missions is, “Where should I go?” or “Which people group should I go to?” The word “go,” a nod to the Great Commission, is almost always part of the question.

As I explored possibilities, it felt like God was calling me to everywhere and to everyone. How could that be? How could I have a burden for all those unsaved and have no special focus on any particular group? In my conversations and readings on missions, it was always assumed that engaging in missions meant going, that is, making a physical move to a different location. I was stuck. I went back to the drawing board and discovered alternative ways of obeying God’s call to be engaged in missions. The process of discovery was hardly a burning bush experience as God spoke through the “ordinary” wisdom of common sense. I discerned that I was weak at evangelism, strong at discipleship, and skilled at communication and building relationships. There were also a few other factors, but, put together, I felt the Lord wanted me to stay so he could use me to help churches and Christians engage in missions, that is, cross-cultural evangelization.

Eventually, I ended up doing this with OMF. My early years of promoting missions (at took a few years before I discovered the word mobilization) were an uphill climb. Sadly, fellow missionaries serving in the frontlines added to the load. I lost count of the number of times I was asked, “So when are you going to the field?”

Persuading others to come out of the invisible wall

The first issue is the main issue that I grapple with as I mobilize churches for missions. Aware of my own slow journey to venture beyond the invisible wall, I am keenly aware that it can be
a long, winding road for the churches I journey with. There are roadblocks along the path that also make the journey arduous: church-centered ministries, church politics, fear of the “unknown,” the misconception that same culture evangelism is already mission work (especially if it takes place outside the church property), the wrong assumption that finance is the only way to engage (ergo, if the church perceives they don’t have that capacity, they conclude that they can’t get involved), and the misconception that missions is a specialized ministry only for, and by, a few.

Sadly, certain roadblocks are placed there by missionaries themselves. In my journeying with churches, I discerned early on a deep distrust toward mission organizations. Churches tend to think that missionaries and their respective agencies are simply out to get their money (mobilization equals fundraising) or their church members (mobilization equals recruitment, or from some churches’ perspective, stealing sheep). To be fair, these perceptions are in some ways true and can partly be attributed to poor mobilization.

With these potential problems in view, how does one start journeying with others along the road to mission involvement? By going back to basics. I find that time needs to be invested in building relationships and ministering to churches before one can even get to talk about the “biblical basis of missions.” As relationships are built, trust and respect develop, and church leaders realize that I am not after their money or their people. More importantly, they discover my desire that they become passionate for God’s wider kingdom work. I want them to discover the invisible walls that separate them from people in need of Jesus. I want to see them grow in courage and passion to venture beyond their invisible walls, spurred on by a desire to participate in what God is doing across cultures.

As much as I work hard at building relationships and sharing from the Word, it is still the Holy Spirit’s work to open people’s spiritual eyes and make them “see” that the walls they inadvertently put up around them have made them blind to the spiritual needs on the outside.

Personally, journeying with mission-minded individuals has required much patience, not only for the individual, but also for me. Being a mobilizer, I find myself stretched as I mentor them toward a more mature understanding of missions—seeing not only who the unreached people groups are, but also what needs to be prepared to engage well for the long haul.

**God led Peter out of the invisible walls**

It can be a challenge to journey with people. Sometimes, no matter how much you build relationships with them and share from God’s word, they either don’t seem to “get it,” or if you don’t follow them up, they retreat back to the safety of the invisible walls. I sometimes wonder if it is worth all the trouble.

At one point, a personal reading of Acts 10, during which I concentrated on the context of the preceding chapters, gave me a better perspective of the ministry that God has put me in. The chapter starts with Cornelius, a Gentile centurion who feared God, heeding God’s instructions to look for Peter. But actually, more than Cornelius, this chapter is about Peter. God zeroed in on Peter and made him move out from behind the invisible wall that he had built around himself.

But just for a little bit of background, Peter had been disciplined by Jesus for three years and in those three years, he was privy to Jesus’ positive regard for Gentiles and the individual commendations he gave to some of them for their faith. Julius Scott observed that:

Other gospels also include hints of a universal purpose in Jesus’ mission…. There were cases in which Jesus healed and/or carried on ministry to individual Samaritans and Gentiles. Mark 11:17, in recording Jesus’ teaching in connection with the cleansing of the temple, includes the full quotation from Isa 56:7b: ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.” … John 10:16 relates Jesus’ reference to his ‘other sheep, that are not of this fold, (whom he) must also bring.’
It can be a challenge to journey with people. Sometimes, no matter how much you build relationships with them and share from God’s word, they either don’t seem to “get it,” or if you don’t follow them up, they retreat back to the safety of the invisible walls.

We see Peter, post-ascension and post-Great Commission, hemmed in behind that invisible wall, despite his journey in ministry with Jesus. He ministered to Jews primarily, and by God’s grace the church grew but stayed within the confines of Jerusalem. In contemporary Christian circles, Acts 2:41–47 is widely used as a model of what an ideal church community should look like. But somehow, the Jerusalem church remained within invisible walls as it ministered mainly to Jews. Much of the spiritual activity or ministry stayed within Jerusalem until the great persecution documented in Acts 8:1. It was only then that there was a more extensive (albeit accidental) evangelism that crossed cultures (Acts 8:1, 4). Interestingly, the next chapter documents Paul’s conversion and his calling to preach Christ to Gentiles (read: cross-cultural missions; Acts 9:15; 22:21; Eph 3:1). It seemed that God had become a little bit more overt about partnership with his followers in the work of cross-cultural evangelism.

So Paul was delegated to reach the Gentiles. Does this mean that the Jerusalem church could go ahead and focus on the Jews? There would have been many “logical” reasons to do so—the church was struggling with personnel as it continued to grow; it was still a very young church that needed to work on a deeper theology that would inform its practice; it still did not have the necessary structure for sending, and it was being persecuted. Surely all these point to the need for more self-care within the early church?

While my human mind would see this as logical, God operates on a different plane. He calls and prepares Paul for cross-cultural work. Interestingly, God then hones in on Peter who was considered one of the leaders of the early church.

Up to this point, Peter’s primary focus in evangelization was the Jews, despite Jesus’ words in Matthew 28:16–20 and then again in Acts 1:8. So Peter gets a more in-your-face directive from God followed by immediate application.

In the memorable rooftop scene in which God reveals to Peter a vision of unclean animals and gives the command to eat them, two things stand out: (1) God had to repeat this vision to Peter three times, and (2) Peter’s knee-jerk reaction in saying, “Surely not, Lord … I have never eaten anything impure or unclean” (Acts 10:9–16). It struck me that what the Lord revealed and instructed him to do was so against Peter’s Jewish identity and culture that God had to patiently show him this vision three times. Furthermore, Peter, who had been courageously obedient since Pentecost, had the audacity to say no to the voice he already had identified as the Lord’s!

It all became clear to Peter when Cornelius’s men arrived and told Peter about Cornelius’s story. To Peter’s credit, he obeyed and, as it was, ventured outside his invisible wall.

That trip was obviously a huge paradigm shift for Peter, who, after hearing Cornelius’s account and witnessing what God was doing amongst the Gentiles, exclaimed, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right” (Acts 10:34–35) and “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have” (Acts 10:47).

God used Peter to influence the early church leadership to open their minds (and hearts) about this invisible wall. It was not an easy journey for the church. Peter himself, when he returned from his paradigm-shifting trip, was confronted by fellow leaders and believers in the early church who, very tellingly, focused on the fact that he went to the “house of uncircumcised men” (Acts 11:3) instead of actually rejoicing that “Gentiles have also received the Word” (Acts 11:1). Peter had to recount everything he went through before they realized that “even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11:18).

A multiplication of mobilization has interestingly taken place in Acts 10 and 11. God mobilizes Peter, and Peter in turn mobilized the church towards cross-cultural missions. I use the term mobilization here to describe what happened to Peter and his unintentional influence on the leaders in Acts 11 in its most basic form of movement into missions rather than its typical usage by modern day mission agencies.

It is mobilization in the sense that God made Peter aware of the need to remove the invisible wall that limited his ministry so that he could see God’s longing that those outside of Jewish culture and tradition might also be given the opportunity to hear the gospel. In turn, having been made aware of this by God, Peter inadvertently did the same with the leadership when they questioned him about entering a Gentile home.

Continued on p.37…
The Glass Footpath of Faith

J. E.

A little while ago, the university which I attend arranged an excursion to a mountain near Beijing. The weather was beautiful. We went up the mountain by cable car, and when we reached the top, walked along a glass walkway bolted onto the side of the cliff. We had the cliff on our left as a wall, a glass floor beneath our feet, and a glass wall on our right. Stepping out onto it was really quite scary. Much of the way, we didn’t want to look down at all.

Perhaps the experience of walking on that glass footpath suspended above emptiness is a bit like the Christian journey of faith. Were we completely certain that the walkway would support us? Perhaps not. With the rational part of our minds, we knew it would, of course. But another part of our minds was saying clearly that we were doing something foolish and that anything could go wrong. We certainly didn’t feel 100% certain that we were safe. But, in fact, the walkway did support us.

Likewise, spiritually speaking, our new nature trusts in Scripture as God’s word, rests upon Christ for justification and sanctification, and trusts in God to work all things for our good; yet our old nature—which is also “us” even as it dies—continues to question and rebel against all of that and welcomes any and all objections to the path we have chosen. It doesn’t want to acknowledge God or believe in Christ for anything at all, and, in fact, never will be persuaded to do so. Thus the church confesses that it is the object of our faith (Christ), not the strength or purity of our faith that will save us. The old nature in us will continue in its unbelief until we die.

This highlights the importance of the work of follow-up with those who have recently come to faith, who need a realistic (that is, a biblical) view of Christian experience, lest they become discouraged and give up. They need to know that by committing ourselves to following Christ, we have all begun a spiritual journey which does not begin with a mind completely free from inner conflict and doubt, but proceeds in the direction of the end goal towards which Christ is drawing us.

The writer of Hebrews refers to the generation of Israelites who left Egypt but failed to complete their journey to an earthly rest (Heb 3:7–11; 4:1–6). The writer, of course, expressed confidence that his Christian audience would not suffer a parallel failure to enter God’s heavenly rest. Nevertheless, even as the Israelites were “baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,” but later perished in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:1–5), many who publicly begin the Christian journey also appear to get lost somewhere along the way.

Those Israelites who failed to enter into God’s earthly rest faced difficulties and distractions not totally different from those which new Christian believers encounter in normal life today: weariness, monotony after initial excitement, and apparently insuperable obstacles which cause them to question the whole idea of having left Egypt in the first place. The Israelites experienced the powerful presence of God at the Red Sea and later at Sinai, but normal daily life was a rather boring diet of manna and quail, which was indeed sufficient for their needs, but by which they seem to have been worn down in the end.

While acknowledging that the Israelites had “good news” preached to them as we do (Heb 4:2), we must also not forget that believers today, and those to whom we collectively seek to minister, have spiritual resources made available to us which were not so obviously available to the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings (Heb 11:39–40). As a nation they were accompanied by Christ—perhaps as the Lord’s Angel promised to Moses (Exod 23:20–21) and also in the “Rock” referred to by Paul (1 Cor 10:4)–whereas we are joined with Christ in a more personal...
way (Col 2:11–12). Nevertheless, even the presence of Christ and the accompanying richer spiritual blessings of the New Testament are not ordinarily given to us in isolation but are mediated to us as we are branches of the vine bearing fruit in the community of disciples (John 15:1–17). This explains the exhortation in Hebrews not to forsake our meeting together as a congregation (Heb 10:25). This is where we hear the word read and preached in community, where we feed on Christ by faith together at his table, and where we pray together as one in the congregational intercessions. In this context, ministry to meet the needs of the poor and the sick is also practiced (Acts 2:41–47). Objectively, Christ gives himself to us through the congregational ministry of the word, sacraments, prayer, and works of service, and thereby strengthens us for the ongoing journey in a way which is independent of our feelings about the terrain, whether we are excited, fearful, or just bored with a diet of doing daily the things we know we ought to do. All New Testament teaching about the ordinary sustaining and sanctifying work of the Spirit of Christ in believers has concrete local churches as its context.

Returning, in conclusion, to our encounter with the glass walkway: as our group approached that unusual path, we were helped onto it, and were helped to continue on it, by the fact that we were part of a group. By ourselves, we perhaps would have turned back, but the presence of others around us continuing along the path encouraged us to do the same. In the Christian journey, however, the church is much more than a morale-boosting circle of friends—helpful as that sort of thing can be. Remember, the Israelites also had the mutual support of being in a community and yet they fell away. Much more than a mere social network, for us and those to whom we aspire to minister, the church is God’s dwelling place through the Spirit, the normal setting for his supernatural work in us, within which our inner man is being renewed day by day, and we are conformed increasingly to the image of Christ, as God works out his higher purpose through us to build a true house of prayer both of and for all nations. This is something that all believers can reflect on, regardless of how far we have walked along the glass footpath of faith, since we will continue to encounter doubts, difficulties, and obstacles along the way. MRT

Continued from Journey Outside the Invisible Wall, p. 35

This was obviously just the beginning, but still a hopeful one. It paved the way for Paul later on when he set out with Barnabas and when he grappled with the Jerusalem church over how Gentile followers should express their faith.7

Reflections on breaking the invisible wall

As much as my reading of Acts 10 has given me a stronger impetus to mobilize—that is, to help people recognize this invisible wall and accompany them on their journey outside the wall—it has also given me a deeper impression of how difficult this ministry is.

Peter and the early church, with Jesus’ ministry and teaching and missional directives still ringing in their ears, still needed that extra (and supernatural) push to engage in cross-cultural ministry. Can we expect less of the present day church with all its complexities? Then again, that “extra push” from God also provides hope in this difficult ministry. If God is so passionate about making sure that the gospel crosses all borders and breaks every invisible wall, surely he will make it happen. I believe that as much as he desires that the church partner with the work of cross-cultural missions, he also desires that there are people in place to challenge, inspire, and journey with churches toward that end. MRT

Endnotes

1 Only later in my journey did I realize that was actually the same Scripture verse Paul referred to in Acts 13:47 when he preached in Pisidian Antioch. Interestingly, hearing this verse drew Gentiles to come to faith that day.

2 Although the verb “go” is not the main verb in the Great Commission recorded in Matt 28:19, it is greatly emphasized in popular Christian culture and it influenced my own thinking about missions early in my journey towards missions involvement.

3 I am aware that the word “promote” presents a number of problems as people tend to associate it with marketing and advertising. But Merriam Webster has one definition of promote as “to help (something) happen, develop, or increase.”


5 It is sad that their reaction to the news that Gentiles had come to faith was not to rejoice. The leaders were so caught up on the breach of religious tradition that they were blind to the wonderful truth that lost souls were actually saved!

6 It may be worth mentioning that the account from the time it started with Cornelius to Peter’s own experience had God’s supernatural fingerprints all over it, from the appearance of an angel, to Peter’s rooftop vision, to the Gentiles’ baptism of the Holy Spirit. There was no way Peter could have been accused of acting on his own accord.

7 It should be noted that Peter’s rooftop encounter with God in Acts 10 had a pivotal role in the decision made by the Jerusalem Council when the leaders discussed the issue of whether Gentile Christians should follow Jewish traditions as part of their faith-expression (cf. Acts 15:7–11).
Journeying Together: 
A Review of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* 
James Steer

We are all familiar with journeys. Many journeys to work each day, others to do the weekly shopping, others will journey for a day or more on their way from one country to another. In most of these journeys we are aware that we are travelling, whether we are taking a quick trip to a store by car or cramped into economy class for twelve hours!

Christians too are on a journey. The author of Hebrews encourages us to “strive to enter that rest” (Heb 4:11, ESV), or as Christian in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* says several times, “I am come from the City of Destruction, and am going to Mount Zion.” This is the Christian life. However, amid the routine and grind of everyday life it is easy for us to forget that we are on a journey. This is where *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is so helpful to us.

*The Pilgrim’s Progress* is a wonderful book full of vivid pictures, anecdotes, and stories about pilgrims traveling to their eternal home. Though it was written over 300 years ago and some of the language is old and difficult to understand, the story is a delightful allegory of the Christian life. The book graphically presents the pilgrims’ (and our) journeys, trials, temptations, battles, and joys in a way which “gets under the skin” in a way that other books don’t. It gives us reason to pause, reflect on our lives, and ask questions like, “How successful have I been in my battle with this sin? How am I helping other Christians in their fight? Am I rejoicing with other believers in their growth?”

Traveling companions

Pilgrim’s Progress starts with Christian coming to an awareness that, because of his own sin, he stands condemned before God. In pure abandon he cries out, “What shall I do to be saved?” At this point he meets Evangelist who directs him to the wicket gate—the narrow gate that Jesus urges us to enter (cf. Lk 13:24). Thus begins Christian’s pilgrimage to the Celestial City. As he travels, he meets people who seek to take short cuts (which lead to their destruction) and he faces hardships (e.g. the Valley of Humiliation). Such encounters along the way help us understand the importance of enlisting “travelling companions” as we journey to the Celestial City.

Christian’s first fellow-traveler is Faithful. Close fellowship provides opportunities for them to encourage one another with the truth of the gospel and to persevere. For example, when Faithful recounted his encounter with Shame, Christian says: “But let us still resist him; for, notwithstanding all his bravadoes, he promoteth the fool, and none else.” Faithful responds, “I think we must cry to Him for help against Shame.”

After Faithful was martyred in Vanity Fair, Christian acquired a new traveling companion called Hopeful, a citizen of Vanity Fair who responded to...
Faithful’s testimony. Further along on the journey, when Christian and Hopeful found themselves trapped in Doubting Castle, Giant Despair encouraged them to kill themselves. Christian’s fears caused him to despair of life itself and he cried out, “my soul chooseth strangling rather than life.”

At this time, Hopeful gave Christian the exhortation he needed: though their situation was dreadful, suicide was not the correct solution; patience was needed in their trial since the Lord may improve their situation.

Through different trials and temptations, Christian and Hopeful persevere until they reach Mount Zion. But the story does not end there. In the second part of Pilgrim’s Progress, we discover the subsequent journey that Christian’s wife, Christiana, and their children took to reach the Celestial City.

Traveling guide

Christiana and the children are given a guide, Mr. Great-Heart, to lead them and a growing company along the way. Though they made the same journey and faced perils similar to Christian’s, we glean new insights as these pilgrims face new situations. Along the journey, Mr. Great-Heart leads the pilgrims to Gaius’s house (cf. Acts 21:16) and Mr. Mnason’s home (cf. Acts 21:16), places of safety and rest that Christian did not experience. Christiana’s encounters along the way help us to see the importance of being part of a church where we can be built up, supported, protected, taught, and equipped as we make our pilgrimage together to the Celestial City.

Mr. Great-Heart’s role is to guide “pilgrims that are going to the Celestial country,” and to “comfort the feeble-minded, and to support the weak.” He describes himself as “a servant of the God of heaven; my business is to persuade sinners to repentance.” As he sees it, “I am commanded to do my endeavors to turn men, women, and children, from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.”

In other words, Mr. Great-Heart’s role is that of a pastor—to proclaim the gospel, to support and nurture weak and struggling Christians, and to bring all God’s people to their final destination.

We see Mr. Great-Heart fulfilling this role throughout the second book: he answers questions of those under his charge, teaches them of righteousness and the gospel, warns them of dangers and leads them through, prepares them for trials, patiently bears with struggling or troublesome believers, rescues various pilgrims from danger, and gathers other believing travelers into his care.

The presence and help of the pastor stands in clear contrast to Christian and Hopeful’s experience. As a result of Mr. Great-Heart’s guidance of the group of pilgrims, they become strong in faith and when they come near to Doubting Castle and Giant Despair, they contemplate whether they can demolish the giant and his castle and set free any captive pilgrims. Indeed, Mr. Great-Heart and five others “fight the good fight of faith” against Giant Despair and defeat him.

Conclusion

Pilgrim’s Progress reminds us that as we journey from the City of Destruction to Mount Zion, we (like Christian and Christiana) need godly traveling companions and a faithful pastor and church if we are to reach our destination safely. Additionally, it shows us that, as workers in Asia, we have various roles to play: we are Evangelist as we seek to proclaim the gospel; we are Mr. Great-Heart as we strive to guide and disciple pilgrims to the Celestial country; we are Gaius and Mnason as we give rest to the weary on the way. Pilgrim’s Progress helps us to see concretely what these different roles and responsibilities look like as we press on, build each other up in Christ, and seek to encourage others on their journey to Mount Zion.

Endnotes

2. Bunyan, Pilgrim’s Progress, 13.
3. Bunyan, Pilgrim’s Progress, 57.
4. Bunyan, Pilgrim’s Progress, 57.
5. Bunyan, Pilgrim’s Progress, 83.
6. Bunyan, Pilgrim’s Progress, 177.
8. Bunyan, Pilgrim’s Progress, 175.
Ministry Across Cultures: Sharing the Christian Faith in Asia


At a time when more and more Christians interact with people from different cultural backgrounds, this book addresses a number of important questions. How do we understand what culture is all about? How do we reach out to people from different cultures? What impact does culture have on “making disciples”? What impact does culture have on the local church?

Among other things, this book seeks to address and answer these questions. In the questions it asks and the answers it gives, Ministry Across Cultures speaks to all Christians who want to reach out to their neighbors and encourage them to join the church. It would be useful for anyone who ministers to people from a different culture, whether at home or overseas. It will similarly speak to both lay people and church leaders as they engage in cross-cultural ministry.

The editor, Warren Beattie, has served in mission and missional education in Belgium, South Korea, Singapore, and the UK. He was the Director for Mission Research with OMF and former editor of Mission Round Table. He is currently a faculty member at All Nations Christian College in the UK.

A Star in the East: The Rise of Christianity in China


The authors begin their book by rightly pointing out that, “most discussions of the religious developments in China have not been based on reliable statistics, properly interpreted” (2). Their slim volume corrects the lack of factual observation and analysis around the rise of Christianity since the 1970s. Stark and Wang are sociologists who base their review on reputable academic surveys and conclude that the historically unprecedented Protestant growth is occurring most among well-educated, well-off urbanites, and also among relatively prosperous and healthy rural dwellers. This fact overturns a pet assumption among many of their scholarly peers that religious adherence is widest at the bottom of societies.

Stark and Wang explain Christianity’s surge as due to spiritual deprivation—a condition whereby traditional faiths are incongruent with the experiences of modernity affecting contemporary Asian countries. Unfortunately, they probably would say it’s beyond the scope of this book to extrapolate further and shed light on why spiritual deprivation and cultural incongruity have not led to similar rises in Christianity in Japan and especially in Taiwan. Another question implied but left unanswered is why many of the elite now embrace Christianity, whereas in the early twentieth century, when there was at least as much cultural dissonance and spiritual dissatisfaction, the elites rejected it. Buddhism, too, receives shorter shrift than it is due. Paying more attention to its relentless pull might help avoid triumphalism on the part of some readers who may think Stark and Wang’s careful analysis foretells Christianity’s inevitable dominance.

Stark and Wang have rendered an invaluable service by making known and making sense of the extraordinary and encouraging data regarding Christianity’s impact on China. Their parting thoughts regarding what might happen if there were more Christians within the Communist Party might be more profitably extended to ask, not just about possibilities of democratic transformation, but whether the Christianization of elites might lead to the true, Christ-enabled fulfilment of aspirations as ancient as China itself, for righteousness (義), faithfulness (忠), integrity (信), and humaneness (仁).