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Called to Serve: Asia

This month's article was written by Michael Carlyle, who serves in Cambodia with his wife, Julie.

Could the Lord be calling you to ministry in Asia? Here are several considerations as you prepare:

Become a slave of God

Have you ever noticed that the apostles identified themselves as servants of God or of Christ? The Greek word "servant" (*doulos*) may also be translated "slave." This pictures one who is owned and must do whatever their master requires, having no right to say "That's too hard," or "I don't have time." This mindset is required of those who serve the gracious One who bought them with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20). Let God be the master, with you willing to go wherever He sends and to do whatever He asks with joy. God always gives grace for the task, and His reward is rich and eternal!



Prepare to labor in evangelism

As with all things in life, you can take shortcuts on the mission field, but they often lead to big problems. The primary task of missions is to communicate the gospel, which the Bible frequently compares to farming—not hunting. I've watched hundreds of Cambodians farming the old-fashioned way. It takes skill, sweat, wisdom, and patience to prepare and sow a field, control the irrigation, protect the crop from harmful weeds and animals, and to know the perfect time to reap. The Bible says that farming is what evangelism is like, and there are no shortcuts in farming.

Get to know culture

Evangelism and discipleship in a cross-cultural setting are challenging because one must communicate the word of God in a foreign language and culture. Make sure you understand Asia's honor-shame and patron-client cultural dynamics, which are vastly different than American individualism. Since communication is a two-way street, thoroughly understand the people you will serve among and how to be properly understood by them. Assume that their view of the Bible's words will be different than what Christians mean by them. For example, when you say "God," they are thinking of a man who achieved nirvana by mediating and doing good works, not our eternal, omnipotent creator. So be prepared to explain, explain, and explain again in words and in ways they can easily understand. Missionaries who fail to grasp the receptor culture and language often struggle to see genuine faith that produces true disciples. Again, there are no shortcuts.



Establish a biblical philosophy of ministry

Successful evangelism and discipleship require just three things: the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:15), a preacher (Romans 10:14), and God's Spirit to illuminate (1 Corinthians 2:10). Did you notice what's not in this list? Money. Though necessary for many things in life, the Bible teaches that the love of money corrupts.

Misunderstanding how money is tied to relative status and power in Asian culture or how relationships are the key to acquiring resources can accidentally lead to "rice Christians," whose faith evaporates once the "wealthy" missionary leaves. So ensure that your philosophy of ministry maintains that you can do the core of your work with no more than a Bible and God's Spirit so that their faith rests on God's power, not on man's wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:5).

Because 60 percent of the world's population lives in Asia and because Christianity has never been its dominant religion, Asia greatly needs the gospel. These four considerations will give you a head start and a strong foundation for sharing that message effectively.

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