

What is a missionary?

By [Randy Hurst](#)

She sits cross-legged on the floor of a hut with a small group of men and women. By patiently teaching the Scriptures, she is discipling spiritual leaders for the first church among a people group where one has never existed.

He stands on the tailgate of a pickup, preaching through a portable sound system to a crowd in a marketplace. At his feet are stacks of evangelistic literature ready to be handed to the eagerly outstretched arms of those who are hungry for more of the message.

She tenderly wraps a bandage around an ulcerated leg after meticulously cleaning the wound. With a loving touch and words of compassion, she demonstrates the love of Jesus to a suffering person who desperately needs the hope of the gospel.

He focuses on a computer screen as he edits a video that tells one of Jesus' parables. He works to phrase the script carefully so it will translate clearly into multiple languages and cultures.

She sits beside a young girl at a sewing machine operated by a foot pedal. Holding a piece of fabric, she teaches her how to meticulously fashion a beautiful dress. Having been rescued from the sex slavery industry, the young girl will use this education to acquire a decent job and help provide for her family.

In a complex world, the Holy Spirit is mobilizing men and women to serve in missions in an increasing variety of ways. Though the methods may be different, the central purpose of each remains the same — to proclaim the message of Jesus to the spiritually lost and establish the Church where it doesn't exist.

The word “missionary” doesn't occur in the Bible. It comes from the Latin word *missio*, which means “sent.” The closest word in the New Testament is “apostle,” which describes a messenger sent on a mission. The apostolic missionary task is taking the message of Jesus to those who haven't heard and establishing His church where it doesn't yet exist. Like the apostle Paul, missionaries have a passion to proclaim the gospel where Christ has not yet been named.

Twice each year the World Missions Executive Committee is given the privilege and responsibility to interview new missionary candidates. We share sacred moments as we sit across the table from them and hear a wonderful progression of testimonies of how God has called them. Each is on divine appointment with a lost world.

What compels a person to leave the comforts and security of home, family and friends to serve Christ in a foreign land? The call.

God's callings are personal. For some, the call is dramatic and unforgettable. For others, it is the steadily growing realization that God is leading them to spend their lives taking the gospel to those who are waiting to hear.

To say "yes" to the call often means surrendering personal dreams and ambitions on the altar of commitment. It can mean facing loneliness and even peril. When God speaks, a response is inescapable. For the consecrated heart there is no option other than "yes." As Paul explained in Romans 12:1, offering our lives to Him who gave His life for us is simply our "reasonable service."

Being a Pentecostal missionary is not a career choice based on human ambition or the desire for that deceptive goal the world calls "success." For obedient followers of Christ, success is simply service to the Master who called them.

The Ethiopian in Acts 8 had God's Word in his hands, in a language he knew, with a seeking mind and a hungry heart. But it wasn't until God put Philip with him that the Ethiopian understood and believed.

Most of the lost in this world are like that Ethiopian. They need a person — a messenger — to come to them.

Even with the benefits of mass literature distribution, the Internet, electronic media and other modern technological advances, God's primary method of redeeming the lost of this world to himself is relational. It requires men and women who will personally take His message of love, forgiveness and everlasting life to those who need to hear it.

In many places of the world, missionaries are still free to proclaim the gospel in public places. People can respond without fear of government intervention or reprisals. But in half of the 33 countries where Assemblies of God missionaries have begun working in the last decade, the gospel cannot be preached openly. Missionaries must be committed to the slow, deliberate task of relationship-building with nonbelievers — a process that sometimes takes years. Most evangelism is done one-on-one.

In recent years, some people have come to us expressing a call to a country that is closed to traditional missionary outreach. Natural circumstances prohibit their entering the country to minister. Yet soon after they answer the call of the Spirit, political situations change and, miraculously, visas are granted. The Holy Spirit

knows what we can't possibly know and calls people even before the door is open. The Spirit defines the strategy of our mission — one life at a time.

God bears the burden of the entire lost world. He shares a portion of that burden with each person He calls in a sovereign plan directed by the Holy Spirit. Looking back on our history, we can marvel at the Spirit's strategy and personal guidance as He orchestrates His plan through the lives of people. In Matthew 20, Jesus taught that in the urgency of the 11th-hour harvest, the Lord of the harvest goes repeatedly to the marketplace to personally recruit servants for His vineyard before He gathers His bride from the four corners of the earth.

Multitudes of lost people are waiting to hear the good news of eternal life. Jesus, the Lord of the harvest, knows each one and longs to reach each heart. He wants everyone to know of His love and salvation. He also knows and has chosen messengers and calls them according to their unique abilities and talents.

Our Lord calls laborers into His harvest field. They respond in obedience. But the mission is not complete until the called are sent. We must all take the Great Commission to heart because it involves the whole church — those who go and those who send.

Paul declared, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:13-15, NIV).

The apostle John exhorted Gaius to send those who went out for the sake of Jesus' name on their way "in a manner worthy of God." He added that "we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth" (3 John 1:8, NASB). Those who support missionaries through prayer and finances are "fellow workers."

Every one of us can be involved in getting the good news of His saving grace to a lost world. The missionary is our representative to those who wait for the message of the Savior.

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