

THE CALL, QUALIFICATIONS AND PREP-  
ARATION OF CANDIDATES FOR FOREIGN  
MISSIONARY SERVICE

26 PAPERS BY MISSIONARIES AND  
OTHER AUTHORITIES

STUDENT VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT FOR FOR-  
EIGN MISSIONS, 3 WEST 29TH STREET, NEW YORK

1901

## WHAT ESSENTIALLY CONSTITUTES A MISSIONARY CALL?<sup>1</sup>

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THERE is an assumption underlying this question, which almost justifies the reply that that which essentially constitutes a call to the foreign field is the absence of a call to stay at home. And although that answer would be altogether too summary, yet, from one point of view, it would be fair to give it. The man who assumes that some special kind of call is required to send him out to the mission field might properly be answered by the inquiry as to what special call other men ought to have to justify them in staying at home. The fact that a man is born in a certain condition does not carry the assumption that he is bound to continue forever in that condition, for he may be born a kleptomaniac. Being born here or there only lays upon us the responsibility of ascertaining whether that is the place wherein we are intended to spend all our lives. However, the answer suggested would not be a fair one. Life is a very complex business, and the Holy Spirit does not work in mechanical grooves. We cannot draw up any brief formula which shall infallibly direct the life. This matter of the missionary call is a complex thing. It involves, for one thing, God's will; and, for another, man's discovery of that will. Possi-

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<sup>1</sup>Report Student Volunteer Convention, London, 1900.

bly, God may have a will for a man which that man is not willing to discover; or the man may desire to do a certain thing and pursue a given course which is not God's will for him.

There are two points which may help to answer the question in a negative way. First, we cannot assume that the absence of a desire to go to the mission field is an indication that we are not to go. Many proceed on the assumption that, unless they want to go, they are not called to go; but that does not follow. One of the best of our old missionaries in China told me, during his fourth visit to the United States, that he never came to America without meeting dozens of ministers who told him that they had made the great mistake of their lives in not answering God's call to the foreign field; yet they did not discover that they had made the mistake until it was apparently too late for remedy. God will not coerce men. He works along the channels of personal desire and inclination. If we refuse to have sympathy with His Son and with His world, He will not drive us into the mission field. I do not believe that a man has any right to ask for a call to missions which shall be of a character or quantity different from the call to practice medicine or law, or to lay bricks, in his own country. A man has a right to take up any kind of work, only so far as God assigns it to him. We have no right to ask, for missionary work, any leading of a kind different from that which we receive as we look toward this or that occupation at home.

Having said these things by way of clearing the ground, I may now say that there are three elements which enter into the determination of a call to the mission field. The first is the need. We know that,

clearly, the need constitutes a call. I stand, for example, upon a river bank, and some people are drowning in the stream. I do not need to have any legal process assigning me to the duty of their rescue. It is enough for me that people are drowning; that they are in need and that I can help them. That constitutes as much and as a great call to me, as if an officer of the law were to take me by the throat and say, "Save those people, or I will put you into prison for your negligence." Need is one great element. A second is absence of any personal disqualification; and we ourselves are not the best judges there. A great many men think they are too intelligent to go out to the missionary field, and others think they are not intelligent enough; but no man is able to judge himself either way. All kinds of qualifications enter into missionary life; but whether we possess the requisite qualifications or lack sufficient of them to disqualify us, is best determined for us by someone else. The third element is absence of any insuperable hindrance, and of course the question whether it is insuperable or not depends upon the personal ability to get over the hindrance. A great many persons are hindered by a difficulty that would not hinder others. I think that when once one has gained a vision of the world's need, like Christ's vision, and a love for it like His love, a great many hindrances will no longer appear to be such.

Take these three things together—the need of the world, the presence of subjective qualifications for missionary service, and the absence of any insuperable obstacles in the way, and I think those three will constitute a presumption that a man ought to go to the missionary field. I think that is not an unfair

way of putting it. In that way it was that Keith-Falconer dealt with himself just before he went out to Arabia. "Whilst vast continents are shrouded in almost utter darkness, and hundreds of millions suffer the horrors of heathenism, or of Islam, the burden of proof lies upon you to show that the circumstances in which God has placed you were meant by Him to keep you out of the foreign mission field."

In other words, the question for us to answer is not, Am I called to the foreign field? but, Can I show sufficient cause for not going? We may be quite sure that if we face in that direction God can much more easily deter us from going, if He so determines, than He can get us out there if we face in the opposite direction. As a friend of mine said, "God Himself cannot switch a powerless engine; but He can use the man who is willing to go out as a missionary, who is moving all the time right out towards the missionary field, trusting God to turn him aside if He sees fit." As we read the life of the Apostle Paul, we find that he was not like a balking horse, always waiting to be driven; but he was ever moving and expecting to receive directions as he moved. He tried this door and that; and when they were shut in his face, he went around until he came to the open door. He did not sit down indolently until God forced him along His way and until he came to the single open door for which he looked.

I think one might properly answer this question by saying that the essential element of a missionary call is an openness of mind to the last command of Christ and to the need of the world; and then one needs only to subject himself to the judgment of the proper authorities as to whether he is qualified to go.