

MAKING DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS

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If we want the 21st century to be the greatest century of missions and revival then we will need to learn from the Christian pioneers whom God used to make the 19th century (1801-1900) the greatest century of Christian advance, so far.

How Christianity became the first truly international religion, in just one century, is an amazing story. What inspired these incredibly effective missionary pioneers, and the successful strategies they used, need to be prayerfully examined if we are to be more effective in world evangelism.

They Changed the World

While the 20th century can boast greater numbers of missionaries in the field, and greater number of converts, the 19th century saw far greater depth of impact for the Gospel. Especially when we consider the very limited resources available to these pioneers and the overwhelming difficulties, dangers and obstacles, which they had to overcome, the missionary pioneers of the 19th century clearly present the most inspiring examples of Christian courage and perseverance, against all odds.

Exhilarating Examples of Excellence

The incredible adventures of these soul-winners, nation-builders and culture-shapers, make for exhilarating reading. The exploits and achievements of these extraordinary Christian heroes and heroines have been mostly forgotten in the countries where they were sent out from. For this reason, it is perhaps appropriate that a new book celebrating some of the adventures, sacrifices and achievements of these missionary pioneers, comes from Africa. For it is we in Africa, who have benefitted so greatly from that 19th century missionary movement.

Honoured in Africa

In this time of secularism and skepticism, some may be surprised to hear how much these missionary pioneers are honoured in Africa. Dr. David Livingstone, for example, has two towns in Africa named after him: Livingstone in Zambia and Livingstonia in Malawi. Other towns in Africa, which were named after Europeans such as Stanleyville, Salisbury, Elizabethville and Fort Victoria, have had their names changed. But Livingstone and Livingstonia remain as a tribute to a man who brought faith to the hearts of Africans, and fear to the hearts of the slave traders. Livingstone is known as a liberator in Africa.

Similarly, while the statues of many colonial figures, such as Cecil John Rhodes, have been toppled and removed, statues and monuments to missionary pioneers, such as David Livingstone, retain their prominence and reflect the deep respect which Africans still have for these Christian pioneers.

Slandering the Saints

There have, of course been many concerted attempts to discredit the memory of the early missionaries. Karl Marx declared that the first battlefield is the rewriting of history. From the time I was first converted to Christ in 1977, I have heard the most vicious slanders against the 19th century missionary movement.

At one of the first missions conferences I ever attended, a Missiology professor from Stellenbosch University declared: *"The missionaries did not believe that black people had souls. They taught that Africans were the firewood of hell!"*

At the time, as a new convert, I did not know very much about anything. But what he said sounded so outrageous and self-contradictory, that I stood up and challenged him. *"Which missionaries taught this?"* I asked him, *"Did David Livingstone or Robert Moffat teach this?"*

The professor looked a little surprised and said: *"No, not them."*

"Did C.T. Studd or Mary Slessor believe these things?" I challenged him again.

He was beginning to look uncomfortable, *"No, no, not them."*

"Well, which missionaries believed and taught this?" I asked. *"Because I don't understand why anyone would have come to Africa to be a missionary, many of them dying of disease here in the field, if they did not believe that the people in Africa were souls for whom Christ died. Didn't many of the missionaries die bringing the Gospel to Africa? Why would they have done that?"*

The university professor never answered my question. He drifted off into some anecdotes about some heartless Church members that he knew who had bad relations with people of other races. I wondered what on earth that had to do with the missionaries of the 19th century, who had opened Africa up for the Gospel, often at the cost of their lives. Although I did not know much about God's Law at the time, I had this uncomfortable feeling that what I had just heard was someone bearing false witness against Christians of another era, who were not present to be able to answer the slander. It seemed cowardly to make a football out of our spiritual fathers.

Facts are Stubborn Things

I have always been interested in history and when I was converted to Christ in 1977, I was overwhelmed with a conviction that I was called to missions. Throughout the last 32 years, I've never doubted that call. I have always been something of a bookworm, so I naturally tended to gravitate towards history books. As my knowledge of missionary history increased, I was astounded at the general ignorance in the church concerning our heritage.

Armchair Critics

I was also most disappointed at the tendency of so many speakers at Missions conferences to disparage the missionary pioneers, who had laid the foundations of the Church in Africa. I could not help wondering if these speakers really thought that we would have done a better job, had we been in their positions. With the few resources they had, and facing the overwhelming obstacles and dangers, which those missionaries confronted, would we have even attempted what they achieved? Hindsight is all very well, but pioneers do not have the benefit of the hindsight of anyone, because they are the pathfinders.

In the Steps of Livingstone

As I ventured into the mission fields of Mozambique, Angola and Sudan, my respect for these missionaries only increased. I was reading Livingstone's Travels while retracing much of his steps in the Shiri Valley (Malawi) and Zambezi Valley (Mozambique) in the mid-1980s, as I was doing the primary research for [*In The Killing Fields of Mozambique*](#).

Tete

In 1989, when I was captured by communist troops in Mozambique and flown by Russian pilots and Soviet MI-8 Hip helicopters to Tete, I was intrigued to see how Livingstone's description of Tete back in the 1850s could so accurately have been applied to Tete in 1989 as well! The devastation from the Muslim slave traders, which he recorded, in his Zambezi Expedition of 1858-1864, could have also described much of the scorched-earth campaign of the communist Frelimo government and their Soviet allies in the 1980s.

Shesheke

On another occasion, as I was going down some of the worst roads I had ever experienced in the Shesheke area, I remembered some of the trials and tribulations of David Livingstone in that very area. As I have regularly had to remind young volunteers on our mission, who complain about the bad roads, David Livingstone had to walk, where we drive.

Livingstone's Travels

He had to walk across an Africa that had no roads, no bridges, no shops and no hospitals. Neither was clean water available. As Livingstone reported after his first missionary journey *"I have drunk water swarming with insects, thick with mud, putrid with rhinoceros urine and buffalo dung."*

Hacking his way through dense rain forests, walking for days in pouring rain, totally drenched, with his equipment either rusting or rotting, Livingstone persevered across the continent. Hostile tribes demanded exorbitant payment for crossing their territory. His life was often in danger from Muslim slave raiders. He was mauled by a lion, charged by rhino and laid low with fever on over 60 occasions. The afflictions Livingstone was called to endure while opening up Africa for the Gospel, and opposing the slave trade, tested the limits of human endurance. Leeches, maggots, putsi flies, cholera, pneumonia, sunburn, huge sores, tropical ulcers and malaria plagued him.

Inspiring Example

Yet, his indomitable spirit rose as he set his heart to accomplish goals, which seemed humanly impossible. He persevered and as a result of his sacrificial labours the slave trade in Central and Eastern Africa was exposed and eradicated. Livingstone's steadfast example was used by the Lord to inspire many hundreds of men and women to devote their lives to African missions. Mary Slessor, for example, went to Calabar (present day Nigeria) and Dr. Kenneth Fraser was inspired to go to Moruland in Southern Sudan.

In 1989 Peter Hammond and a Frontline team were captured by communist troops in Northern Mozambique. Soviet MI-8 helicopters flew them to prison

Marxist Myths

Modern detractors of the 19th century missionary movement like to brush aside the historical realities, which the missionaries had to confront and prefer to paint Africa before the influence of the Gospel as idyllic and Utopian.

Kenneth Kaunda, the onetime dictator of Zambia, wrote in his book *"A Humanist in Africa"* that the people in Africa knew nothing about suffering until the missionaries arrived! According to people like Kaunda, all Africans lived in peace, harmony, tranquillity and prosperity before the missionaries arrived with the Gospel. One might expect such ahistorical ramblings from committed Marxists who hate the Gospel, but incredibly all too many Christians, because of their ignorance of history, repeat these allegations, even in Christian publications.

The Reality of Heathenism

Mary Slessor was horrified when she arrived in Calabar to discover that *"a woman who gave birth to twins was regarded with horror. The belief was that the father of one of the infants was an evil spirit, and that the mother had been guilty of a great sin to bear twins. At least one of the children was believed to be a monster, and so twins were seized, their backs were broken, they were crushed into a calabash or water pot and taken out, not by the doorway, but by a hole broken in the back wall which was at once built up again, and thrown into the bush, where they were left to be eaten by insects and wild beasts!"*

Mary found Calabar in the grip of rampant witchcraft, drunkenness and immorality. She intervened to prevent a witchdoctor from pouring boiling oil over a woman spread-eagled on the ground. Cannibalism and slavery between the tribes was widespread.

Once, when instructed to heal a dying chief, Mary knew that if she failed she would be blamed for his death. First she got rid of all the witchcraft charms and the sacrificed chickens lying around his hut, and then she prayed and gave the chief good medicine, nursing him back to health. The wives of the chief were particularly grateful for Mary's success, because they would have otherwise been killed and buried with the chief, if he had died. These wives were understandably keen to learn about "The Book."

Human Sacrifices

Samuel Marsden, pioneer missionary to New Zealand, witnessed the depth of degradation and the hold of superstition over the Maori people, when the widow of the deceased chief hanged herself with the approval and applause of her parents and brothers. Cannibalism was rife amongst the Maori. One woman confessed that she had killed and eaten 19 children.

Missionaries to the New Hebrides found human sacrifices and cannibalism rife throughout the Pacific. In Fiji, two-thirds of all children were boiled and eaten. Every village had a human butcher. Aged parents were butchered and eaten by their children. Men would even cook their best wife or child as a special feast for their friends.

John Paton, missionary to the New Hebrides, reported on an occasion on Tanna, when three women were killed in a human sacrifice to secure the recovery to health of the chief. When missionary to the South Sea Islands, John Williams, was criticised for imposing foreign Christian standards upon unwilling communities living in "*primitive bliss*", he noted that these same communities were societies where laziness, promiscuity, human sacrifice and the burial alive of infants had shortly before been commonplace.

Massacres in China

Far from the missionaries interrupting the peace and tranquillity of pagan nations, often the missionaries came to nations that were passing through violent upheavals. When Hudson Taylor first landed in Shanghai in 1854, the country was being torn apart by a vicious civil war, the so-called Taiping rebellion. Rebels held the city and 50,000 Imperial troops besieged it. The house that Hudson was staying in, in Shanghai, was struck by gunfire and the house next to his was destroyed. He frequently witnessed people being beheaded and himself came very close to being lynched on occasion. Over 25 million Chinese were killed in two civil wars that raged in the 1850s and the 1860s in China. Another 10 million died between 1877 and 1879, during a famine in the North of China.

Confronting Paganism

As Dr. George Grant states, in his Introduction to *The Greatest Century of Missions*: "As missionaries moved out from Christendom to the uttermost parts of the earth, they were shocked to discover all the horrors of untamed heathenism. They found abortion all too prevalent, infanticide all too commonplace, abandonment all too familiar and euthanasia all too customary. They were confronted by the spectres of endemic poverty, recurring famine, unfettered disease and widespread chattel slavery ...cannibalism, ritual abuse, patricide, human sacrifice, sexual perversity, petty tyranny, paternalistic exploitation, live burials, exterminative clan warfare and genocidal tribal vendettas all predominated.

Life and Liberty

"As missionaries circled the globe, penetrated the jungles and crossed the seas, they preached a singular message: Light out of darkness, liberty out of tyranny and life out of death. To cultures endemic with terrible poverty, brutality, lawlessness and disease, those faithful Christian witnesses interjected the novel Christian concepts of grace, charity, law, medicine and the sanctity of life. They overturned despots, liberated the captives and rescued the perishing. They established hospitals. They founded orphanages. They started rescue missions. They built alms-houses. They opened soup kitchens. They incorporated charitable societies. They changed laws. They demonstrated love.

*They lived as if people really mattered. Wherever missionaries went, they faced a dual challenge: **confront sin in men's hearts and confront sin in men's cultures.***"

Overcoming Obstacles

The obstacles, dangers and difficulties that they had to face and overcome were staggering. By an act of British Parliament, missionaries were illegal in India. In China, not only was all missionary activity completely illegal, but so was attempting to learn the Chinese language! There was a ban on any Chinese teaching their language to foreigners.

Robert Morrison

The Chinese tutors to Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to China, carried poison on their bodies so that if they were discovered, they could end their lives quickly and escape torture. Because at that time the Chinese forbade foreign women, Robert Morrison had to live apart from his wife, Mary, for most of their lives, once for six years.

Adoniram Judson

America's first foreign missionary, Adoniram Judson, was captured on the high seas and incarcerated in a French prison, from which he escaped. Later he was imprisoned and tortured in "Death Prison", in Burma, for eighteen months.

Even if There is No Road at All

When a mission organisation wrote to David Livingstone asking: *"Have you found a good road to where you are? If so, we want to send other men to join you."* Livingstone replied: *"If you have men who will come **only** if they know there is a good road, I don't want them. I want men who will come even if there is no road at all."*

Not a Sacrifice

Livingstone expressed the attitude of most of the missionaries of the 19th century when he wrote: *"**These privations, I beg you to observe, are not sacrifices. I think that word ought never to be mentioned in reference to anything we can do for Him, Who though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor.**"*

Sacrifice and Service

C.T. Studd, the famous cricket captain turned pioneer missionary, declared: *"**If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.**"*

From the Jaws of Hell

As he suffered malaria and other attacks, C.T. Studd wrote: *"**Some like to live within the sound of Church or Chapel bell, I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.**"*

Rescue the Perishing

In the words of C.T. Studd: *"Christ's call is to capture men from the devil's clutches and snatch them from the very jaws of hell, to enlist and train them for Jesus and make them a mighty army of God. But this can only be accomplished **by red-hot, unconventional, unfettered Holy Spirit religion... by reckless sacrifice and heroism in the foremost trenches.**"*

It is a Privilege

The challenge of Livingstone rings out to us today: *"Can that be called a sacrifice, which is simply paid back as a small part of a great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay... it is emphatically no sacrifice. **Say rather it is a privilege!**"*

Dynamic Devotion

Studying the sacrifices and exploits of the pioneer missionaries of the 19th century is most challenging and inspiring. These were ordinary people made extraordinary by a dynamic and vibrant Christian faith, which carried them through some of the worst circumstances imaginable.

Uncommon Christians

David Livingstone wrote that we need to be: **"uncommon Christians, i.e. imminently holy and devoted servants of the Most High... let us seek that selfishness be extirpated, pride banished, unbelief driven from the mind, every idol dethroned and everything hostile to holiness and opposed to the Divine will crucified; that holiness to the Lord may be engraved on the heart and evermore characterise our whole conduct."**

Decisive Obedience

C.T. Studd testified: **" I once had another religion,... hunting the Bible for hidden truths, but no obedience, no sacrifice. Then came the change. The real thing came before me... words became deeds. The commands of Christ became not merely Sunday recitations, but battle calls to be obeyed,... assent to creed was born again into decisive action of obedience."**

Firm Foundations

Hudson Taylor stated that his life was based upon three facts: **"There is a living God. He has spoken in the Bible. He means what He says and He will do all that He has promised."**

Called to China

Hudson Taylor wrote of the *"intense longing for God"* that gripped him and of the conviction that never left him that he was called to China.

God Never Fails

Hudson Taylor agonised in prayer for China, sometimes praying through the night. He wrote of wrestling with his *"unbelief"* and how *"the Lord conquered my unbelief and I surrendered myself to God for this service."* At the end of his long life, Hudson Taylor could declare that: **"The sun had never risen upon him in China without finding him at prayer." "...The battle is the Lord's and He will conquer. We may fail, do fail continually, but He never fails."**

Triumphant Faith

The pioneer missionaries of the 19th century were inspired by a most positive and optimistic faith. They were absolutely convinced that the Lord, who gave the Great Commission, would ensure that it was fulfilled. **"The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you."**

First Fruits

When, after 7 years of labouring in China, Robert Morrison saw the first Chinese convert, he wrote: *"May he be the first fruits of a great harvest; one of millions who shall believe and be saved."*

Faith to Scale Mountains

Scotland's first foreign missionary, Alexander Duff, declared: *"Oh what promises are ours, if we had only the faith to grasp them! What a promise is that in the Great Commission - go and make disciples of all nations, and lo I am with you, even to the end of the world! We go forth amongst the hundreds of millions of the nations; we find gigantic systems of idolatry and superstition, consolidated for thousands of years... they tower as high mountains, but what does faith say? Believe and it shall be. And if any Church on earth will realise that faith, to that Church will the honour belong of evangelising the nations, and bringing down the mountains."*

A Vision of Victory

When, after 7 years labour in India, Carey was able to witness the conversion of Krishna Pal from Hinduism, Carey declared: *"The Divine grace, which changed one Indian's heart, could obviously change 100,000!"*

God's Cause Will Triumph

Carey declared: *"The work, to which God has set His hands, will infallibly prosper... we only want men and money to fill this country with the knowledge of Christ. We are neither working at uncertainty nor afraid of the result... He must reign until Satan has not an inch of territory!"* **"God's cause will triumph!"**

Attempt Great Things for God

In the words of William Carey's historic sermon, which launched the modern missionary movement: ***"Expect great things from God! Attempt great things for God!"***

Discipling Nations

By God's grace, Carey was able to successfully campaign against the Hindu practice of **Sati**, where widows were burned alive on the funeral pyres of their deceased husbands. Carey also ended the practice of burning lepers alive. Carey established the first newspaper ever printed in an oriental language, introduced the steam engine to India, pioneered lending libraries, introduced savings banks, pioneered forest conservation, established the first Christian College in Asia (which is still training leaders) and succeeded in producing and distributing over 200,000 Bibles, New Testaments or Gospels in 36 languages, in addition to many books and tracts.

Calabar for Christ

By God's grace, through the ministry of Mary Slessor, the killing of twins ceased, slave trading in Calabar was eradicated, drunkenness, killing and witchcraft diminished, many schools and Churches were established and most of the people of Calabar came to embrace the Gospel of Christ.

New Zealand for Christ

The first public Christian worship service in New Zealand was conducted on Christmas Day, 1814, by Samuel Marsden. By 1845, it was reported that 98% of the Maori's had embraced Christianity.

Cannibals for Christ

By the time John Williams was clubbed to death and eaten by cannibals on the Island of Erromanga, in 1839, he had succeeded in transforming scores of Islands by the Scriptures he had translated, schools he had established, Churches he had built and many thousands of Islanders had come to salvation in Christ.

Wholehearted for Christ

John Williams had been converted 25 years earlier by a sermon based on ***"What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"*** (Matthew 16:26). True to the verse that he had heard on the night of his conversion in 1814, John Williams had found his life by losing it for Christ.

Faith of their Fathers

Frank Paton followed in his father, John Paton's, footsteps, and became a missionary to the Island where his father had been forced to flee for his life 34 years ago. During his ministry there, Frank was blessed to see the whole population of Tanna won for Christ.

Similarly, Robert Morrison had the joy of seeing his son, John Morrison, follow in his footsteps and pour his heart and soul into the work of bringing the Gospel to the people of China.

All Adoniram Judson's five surviving children grew up to distinguish themselves in Christian service.

Robert Moffat, who produced the first, complete translation of The Bible into an African language, had the joy of seeing five of his seven children actively involved in missionary service. His son, John Moffat, established the first mission station amongst the Matabele.

Two of C.T. Studd's daughters, Edith and Pauleen, who had been born in China, came out and worked alongside him, with their husbands, in his Heart of Africa Mission in the Congo.

Setting the Captives Free

One of the many fruits of William Wilberforce's life-long crusade against the slave trade, was that Samuel Crowther, who was born in Yorubaland (modern Western Nigeria) became the first African bishop of the Church of England. Samuel Crowther was captured by African slave traders and sold to a Portuguese trader for transport across the Atlantic, but he was rescued by a British Naval Squadron. Samuel was converted to Christ. Received an education both in Sierra Leone and in England, and in 1843 was ordained as a minister of the Church of England for service with the Church Missionary Society.

Nigeria for Christ

In 1864, Crowther was ordained as the first African bishop of the Church of England and directed to undertake a mission along the Niger River. This was to follow up on the anti-slavery expedition led by Wilberforce's successor, T. Foxwell-Buxton. This expedition up the Niger River Valley of West Africa was to overcome the ravages of the slave industry still entrenched there. Of the 145 Europeans on that expedition, 130 were struck down with malaria, and 40 died.

Set Free to Serve Christ

Yet, the expedition succeeded in establishing a missionary centre at Fourah Bay for training liberated slaves to evangelise West Africa. It was built on the very place where a slave market had once stood. The rafters of the roof were made almost entirely from the masts of old slave ships.

Samuel Crowther led converts in burying or destroying witchcraft charms, fetishes and idols, and worked effectively at indigenising an evangelical Anglicanism, which was truly African.

Mobilising Missions

Missions is the lifeblood of the Church, and it is absolutely essential that our congregations and families be presented with these and many other inspiring examples of those whose efforts God blessed in such extraordinary ways.

Examples of Excellence

As we launch this new book, it is my prayer that ***The Greatest Century of Missions*** will be used by Christian High Schools, to train seniors in a most important era in history; that Bible Colleges will incorporate it into their missions training programmes; that pastors will include many of these testimonies as sermon illustrations; and that families will read these examples together, feeding their minds and souls with examples of excellence.

Inspiring Mind and Soul

I pray that the selected adventures, sacrifices, exploits, pictures and achievements presented in ***The Greatest Century of Missions*** will whet the appetite of all who read it, to obtain more missionary biographies and to start the lifelong habit of making time to feed mind and soul with what Alexander Somerville described as: "*the noblest object that can engage the enthusiasm of man - the salvation of millions!*"

Please help us make this book known and available to those in your congregation and community. May God be pleased to use [***The Greatest Century of Missions***](#) to inspire a new generation of missionaries to expect great things from God and to attempt great things for God.

"Only one life it will soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last!"

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See also:

[*Victorious Christians – Who Changed the World*](#)

[*How the Greatest Century of Missions was Derailed into the Worst Century of Persecution*](#)