

Lose the Guilt Following the Shepherd into Missions

| by Jeff Boesel |

Mobilizers of the missions force often let their passion to see more harvesters in the harvest field push them to lay a guilt trip on believers who don't sense the same urgency. I am sure you have heard it. "Millions are dying without Christ each year and yet so few are willing to go. Why work here in the United States where there is a church, literally, within reach of every person when there are countries where there are complete cities with no light whatsoever." There can be no denying that these are true statements and yet I would challenge the need to use them to motivate.

All believers are responsible to answer the Great Commission. Our very lives are to be the light in the darkness wherever we are. Missionary statesman Dick Hillis said it this way, "Every heart with Christ...a missionary. Every heart without Christ...a mission field." The 27 year old founder of Commission Expeditions, Joél Malm, defines a missionary as "someone doing ministry they should be doing anyway in their home culture, in a different culture." These are truths we all hold. The need for harvesters is evident in our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria *and* in the uttermost parts of the earth. There is no lack of opportunity, wherever we find ourselves. Life *is* and *should be* ministry.

So the question is not whether we should be involved in ministry (life-style or full-time) but where God might have us minister? Is God, at this time in our lives, leading us to leave our home culture and live our lives for him in a different culture? Please consider the following thoughts.

God's leading will be clear and will seem like the obvious choice. In listening to each missionary's story of obedience to God's leading on their lives, one thing is constant. God, through many varied means, brought each one to a point of decision where the choice was obvious and his leading was clear. Become a cross-cultural missionary or disobey. If you are reading this my guess is that you have committed yourself to be obedient to God's leading in your life to the best of your ability. When faced with that clear choice, my prayer is that you will obey. If his leading is not clear and obvious, wait until it is.

Here is why I believe I can say this with confidence. First, Proverbs 3:5,6 tells us that if we trust in the Lord and acknowledge him along our way, not dependant on our own understanding, he will make our path straight. I would interpret this as putting one foot in front of the other and not being concerned about whether the path turns left or right. The straight path is the obvious path. Second, if God can cause completely pagan leaders like Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar to follow his exact leading, though they thought themselves to be gods, is he not able to make his will clearly known to us, people committed to following him, and direct us in it? Finally, if God wants us to do something that seems completely illogical, he will give us more to go on. Moses and the burning bush is my favorite example of this. What God was asking him to do was, logically, certain death without hope of success. So God emphasized his leading with the supernatural, a bush burning (but not burning up), an audible voice and a couple miracles to take with him for good measure.

God's leading will be unavoidable. By saying this I don't mean that we cannot rebel and go the other way. Jonah certainly did. But what happened to Jonah? He ended up right where God wanted him, doing what God wanted him to do in spite of his initial rebellion. I am saying that we don't have to worry about missing God's leading. If we happen to turn away from it the first time, God will bring it back around. It will eventually become the only real choice no matter which way we turn.

Let me share how this played out in my own life. After around eight years as an Air Traffic Controller I sensed that God had something else in store for me. I had felt that leading before, earlier in my life, and I ignored it. That led to *my* "big fish" story and, like Jonah's, it was not pretty. I was not about to go through that again so I committed to take action. Becoming a missionary wasn't a clear choice, even though both my wife's and my parents are missionaries. All I knew was that it was time for a change. So we followed the obvious path and started to apply to different air traffic jobs which were available. One by one these doors continued to close while, in the mean time, God gently kept bringing missions to our minds through music we were listening to, sermons we were hearing, and books we were reading. Finally, we realized that we were not treating the opportunity to be involved as missionaries in the same way we were approaching other "job" opportunities. We were taking initial steps toward all other openings but were not taking any steps toward missions. After much prayer, we determined to take a step toward cross-cultural ministry. That door stayed open and we have been on that path ever since.

As a mobilizer I am saying, "Don't go!" unless God leaves you no other choice. Consider this. It is as rebellious to pursue missions out of God's will as it is rebellious to turn away if he is leading in that direction. Our responsibility is obedience. God's responsibility is bringing the lost world to himself. As we are obedient, he will use us in his work as he pleases, wherever he places us. As we remain in him fruit happens.

So, lose the guilt. Just follow the Shepherd.