

Module 7

How to Handle Excuses

Have you heard the latest statistics? They are really rather sobering.

China has 1 Missionary for every 700,000 people
India has 1 Missionary for every 2 million people
Indonesia has 1 Missionary for every 68,000 people
Pakistan has 1 Missionary for every 213,000 people
Bangladesh has 1 Missionary for every 250,000 people
Japan has 1 Missionary for every 26,000 people
Vietnam has 1 Missionary for every 2 million people
Russia has 1 Missionary for every 140,000 people
Iran has 1 Missionary for every 3 million people
Turkey has 1 Missionary for every 270,000 people
America has 1 missionary for every 2,700 People

I have asked myself many times why this is. Why does the world still look like this even though we have had 2,000 years since Christ gave His Great Commission? There are as many answers to that question as there are people. But the obvious conclusion must be that it is not God's fault, it is ours. God's agenda has taken a back seat to ours. As soon as you start challenging students to take seriously the redemption of all nations you have entered sacred territory. You are threatening the very core of their life purpose and that kind of thing doesn't give too easily. They have spent much time, money and energy planning the most efficient fulfillment of their dreams and you are confronting them with a crossroads. So get ready, here they come...the excuses. They come in all shapes and sizes and most people are committed to them, so if you are going to impart missions vision to people you must be prepared to combat these excuses. We've collected a list of some of the most popular ones along with some handy tips for countering and disarming them.

“But what about my debt?”

For every \$1 an American makes they spend \$1.10. This is not good. With credit card booths in the student center and the price of tuition on the rise, debt is an ever-lurking evil for the average college student. It is a real issue! Many students upon graduation are already staring at \$10,000 debt. Many students wish their debt was as small as \$10,000! How the Christian college student deals with the subject of missions will be seriously affected by their debt situation. Some will use their debt as an automatic excuse to never go overseas, some will procrastinate their involvement until they get it taken care of. So what do you tell them? Should they expend even more money to go on a short-term mission trip this summer or focus on getting out of debt? The initial reaction to this question is usually an emphatic “no!” to going overseas, but there are a few

options. First, many students are not motivated to get out of debt and therefore find themselves incurring more. Maybe what would motivate them is to go overseas on a short term trip. Many times a small glimpse of the reality of world poverty will cure any lethargy about getting out of debt and any carelessness about standard of living. Another option is to raise not only the necessary money for the trip, but to also raise an extra sum of money to cover expenses while on the trip. For example, if a trip is \$2,500 and lasts a month, why not raise an extra \$800-\$1,000 to offset the amount you could have earned if you had stayed home and worked? If car or housing payments are the issue the same would apply. A short-term trip is a great motivator to becoming debt free!

What about longer-term? Is that even an option? Yes. I know of a girl who had \$400 a month in debt after graduation, but felt strongly that she should go to the Middle East to reach Muslims. Her debt was a roadblock. She asked her mission agency if it would be ok to raise above and beyond the support needed so she could offset the cost of her debt every month. They agreed. She asked two people to give \$200 a month specifically toward her debt and found out that people were more than happy to do it! To them, this \$200 a month was the best investment they could make. This is not a way to shove off the consequences of irresponsible spending and should not be taken advantage of, but it is a viable way for people who sincerely desire to serve overseas to be freed from the bondage of debt. Debt is a real issue, but it is not a valid excuse.

“But I don’t have that kind of money?”

Not many college students have \$3,000 tucked in their savings waiting to be spent at a moments notice on a mission trip. So what do you do when someone tells you they can’t go overseas because they don’t have any money? First, help them to understand that their mission trip is totally and completely free. You’re probably thinking “Wait a minute; I thought you just said it was a \$3,000 trip!” Well it is, but they need to understand the Biblical concept of raising support. In Matthew 10:9-10 Jesus talks about how the worker is worthy of his wage and Paul the Apostle echoed this when he talked about the privilege he had to raise support in I Corinthians. 9:1-18. So the trip is free for them because God has set up an economy where His body supports those who go out. It may be an overwhelming concept at first, but its really quite simple. All they need to do is make a list of people they know, send them a letter of explanation, followed up by a phone call and sometimes a personal appointment to further explain financial needs. There are only two types of students who refuse to do this: the ignorant and the arrogant. The ignorant are unaware of the fact that the Bible speaks of support raising and that God has placed people in their life who are prepared to give. The arrogant are too prideful to call anyone on the phone and “beg” for money. It is below them to show any sign of need. In fact, it is not begging at all, it is the Biblical model set up by God himself and modeled by Jesus: Luke 8:3 “Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.”

“But I don’t feel called?”

This is one of the most prevailing excuses around today. The infamous... “God hasn’t called me overseas!” So how are we to respond to this excuse? First, if you do a word study on the word “called” you will find that the only calling in scripture is the

calling to come to Christ for salvation. As a matter of fact, Paul the apostle equated his coming to Christ with his responsibility to reach all nations. Listen to what he says to the Galatians, (Galatians 1:15-16) “But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles (Nations).” Paul understood he had a general obligation to take the gospel to all nations simply because God had extended salvation to him. Second, when Paul received a “call” into a specific place for ministry, it was while he was actively ministering and fasting (Acts 13:1-4). Most people, while lamenting, “I am not called” are just using that as an escape and are far from ministering and fasting before God to find direction. Oh, and by the way the last verse in Acts 12 talks about how Paul had just returned from his first mission trip! Apparently, Paul thought it best to be obedient to the purpose of God in the world instead of being hung up on the specifics. So next time someone says they don’t feel called just ask them how many mission trips they have been on, what they are doing for the Lord right now and how often they are fasting about the decision.

“But my parents would never let me go.”

Let’s just admit it; historically we have made some bad decisions. Everyone has! It’s a part of growing up! As true as this it, it is also true that parents have seen every single one of our lousy choices. Dating and breaking up with all the wrong people, discontent with cars and jobs, changing majors 2-3 times and this list goes on. And now a mission trip for the summer in North Sudan! Sounds like another bad idea to mom and dad. Can we blame them? There are really two types of parents who say no to their child going on a mission trip - those who mean it and those who don’t. There are some parents who say, “if you go on this mission trip don’t bother coming home ever again and plan on paying for your car and college when you get back.” In this case I would highly advise waiting until they are a little more softened to the idea. Tell the student to heed the advice of their parents while they are under their authority. In the meantime, they can spend their summer reaching out to internationals in the community. The other parent says no as more of a smoke screen to see if their child is serious or if it’s just a passing phase. The difference with this type of parent is that as they are consistently informed, see their child taking responsible steps toward the trip and grow increasingly interested, they grow in confidence of their child’s decision and will eventually concede. Most parents fall into the latter category. Be careful that the student using their parents as an excuse is not hiding behind a situation that doesn’t really exist.

There is a balance in scripture that God desires us to have and we must be careful not to be extreme and one-sided. The balance is between Exodus 20:12 “Honor your father and your mother” and Luke 14:26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple.” How do these two passages co-exist? I think what God is saying is that there is a way to honor our parents, heed their advice and still follow God’s will over our parents’ will. Generally, the cultural transition point from submission to independence happens at college graduation. Usually at this time a person is viewed as “on their own”. It’s rare to hear 30-40 year old saying, “I would go overseas, but my parents won’t let me”. They are making their own decisions.

The key is helping the student genuinely try to understand from their parents' perspective. Explain that it is hard for them to let their child go into a potentially dangerous, seemingly irresponsible and certainly expensive situation with their full consent! Encourage the student to respectfully discern God's path for them, spending much time before the Lord and seeking a lot of counsel.

“But I am not ready spiritually to go.”

When I was in college this is the one I fell back on. I was challenged to give my summer to reaching out to the Muslims in North Africa for 8 weeks by an individual who was a missions zealot. My response to him was “But I am not ready to go!” He didn't hesitate with his response, “Ok, I'll give you 20 minutes...get ready.” “What, no wait! I don't think you understood what I meant!” I thought. In reality, he understood me perfectly.

So how will you respond? You might begin by asking the student what they are waiting for...what will make them feel ready? If it is truly an issue of spiritual maturity and they are neglecting the spiritual disciplines, then be prepared to walk them through the basics of Bible study, prayer and evangelism. Often, however, they are waiting to become sinless, to have totally pure motives or to love the people as Christ does! If that's the case, they will never be “ready.” Missionaries are real people that have real problems. No one reaches a certain spiritual state and then becomes qualified. Actually, the process works in the reverse order. Once a person goes and catches a real vision for the nations, realizes the incredible task at hand, they will see an increased intimacy with Christ. If the goal before us is small, our dependence on the Lord will be small. On the other hand, if our aspirations are great, our reliance on the sufficiency of God will be great. K.P. Yohannan, Director of Gospel for Asia, says if someone has been a Christian for longer than 8 weeks, they are qualified.

Encourage the student to not let their feelings of insufficiency keep them from the field, they are just the kind of candidate the Lord is looking for. “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong” (1 Corinthians 1:27).

“But I don't really have a heart to go.”

When a person comes at you with this excuse, help them to see what the natural state of man is without Christ. Here are some of the descriptions found in the New Testament: dead in trespasses and sins, lost, blind, selfish, enemy of God, living for the lust of flesh, indulging in the desires of flesh, a child of wrath, walking according to the ways of the devil, unable to understand, useless, deceitful, bitter, destructive, miserable, without fear of God, incurring the wrath of God, and this is just a sampling. The person above is totally unable to have a heart for the world like God does. However, when a person accepts Christ something happens. Ezekiel explains it this way: “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ezek 36:25-27). The salvation experience involves a change of heart. The heart that formerly could not care for the world and its lost, thrived on selfishness and craved sin was taken out and

in its place the Lord put a heart of flesh. Now it is possible to care, love, give and go. That heart is already in any Christian; all that needs to be done is cultivation. So when someone says “But I don’t really have a heart to go” our response should be “Yes you do if you’re a believer...just cultivate it by praying, giving, going short term and reaching out to internationals on campus.”

“But what about the needs here?”

This is another very common excuse that you may often run into. I usually answer it with the example of *triage*. It is a medical term that means that those who have the worst injuries get priority over other injuries. So if someone comes in the emergency room with a leg that has been cut off they will take priority over the person who is waiting with a sprained ankle. Why is that? Do the doctors love the person with the severed leg more than the sprained ankle? Of course not. His need is more urgent and therefore takes priority. What if we appropriated that to missions, *missionary triage*? Its application would be simple: those with the greatest need, the least reached, without a church get priority over those cultures with established churches. Keith Green, a zealous musician who recruited for missions, says “Since America has only about 5% of the world’s population, then only about 5% of the believers would really be called to stay in this country as a witness (that’s only about 1 out of 20) while the rest of us should go into the parts of the world where there are almost 0% believers.” Unfortunately, that is not the case. On the contrary, 95% of believers will stay within the United States. Are there needs in the United States? Without a doubt. It is impossible to walk around a college campus in America without seeing the need for more Christian laborers. But there’s one thing to remember, there will always be a need in America. Needs are everywhere. Maybe its time to stop focusing on the needs and instead focus on the greatest need - those with no gospel access.

We need to make sure that our definition of missions aligns correctly with God’s. In Revelation 5:9 God gives us His definition of missions, “And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God *from every tribe and language and people and nation.*’” His goal is to have a representative from every tribe, tongue and nation and therefore, missions is our participation in the completion of this goal. All of our efforts, energy, money and time need to be poured into seeing this become a reality. John Piper in his book *Let the Nations Be Glad* gives a wonderful illustration of this very point:

“Suppose there were two ocean liners on the sea, and both began to sink at the same time with large numbers of people on board who did not know how to swim. There are some lifeboats, but not enough. And suppose you were in charge of a team of ten rescuers in two large boats.

“You arrive on the scene of the first sinking ship and find yourself surrounded by hundreds of screaming people, some going down before your eyes, some fighting over scraps of debris, others ready to jump into the water from the sinking ship. Several hundred yards farther away the very same thing is happening to the people on the other ship.

“Your heart breaks for the dying people. You long to save as many as you can. So you cry out to your two crews to give every ounce of energy they have. There are five rescuers in each boat and they are working with all their might.

They are saving many. There is lots of room in the rescue boats. Then someone cries out from the other ship, 'Come over and help us!' What would love do? Would love go or stay?

"I cannot think of any reason that love would leave its life-saving labor and go to the other ship. Love puts no higher value on distant souls than on nearer souls. In fact, love might well reason that in the time it would take to row across the several hundred yards to the other ship, an overall loss of total lives would result... Love may not see the missionary task the way God does.

"God may have in mind that the aim of the rescue operation should be to gather saved sinners from every people in the world (from *both* ocean liners), even if some of the successful rescuers must leave a fruitful *reached people* (the first ocean liner), in order to labor in a (possibly less fruitful) *unreached people* (the second ocean liner).

"In other words, the task of missions may not be merely to win as many individuals as possible from the most responsive people groups of the world, but rather to win individuals from *all* the people groups of the world."

It is imperative that our definition of and participation in missions are not dictated by culture or by human reason. God has a plan and it includes every nation! Help the student to see the difference between God's ultimate desire and man's logic. The reason for their struggle with the needs in America may be rooted in a lack of knowledge of the world's needs. The point is not that staying in America and ministering here is second-class. That is a perfectly legitimate need. But in all we do, the underlying purpose ought to be the total fulfillment of God's mission.

"But isn't it better to send my money?"

In today's world economy and the increasing value of the American dollar, sending money instead of people has become a very alluring option. I was at an appointment with an affluent pastor. We were on the subject of missions and I was challenging him to consider giving to our ministry. His response took me off guard. He said that neither he nor his church were supporting Americans because their dollar goes a lot further when given to a native worker. It makes sense and I'm sure this pastor's intention was to make a wise economic decision, but is it a healthy perspective? For some, it may serve as an attempt to justify a lack of involvement? Here are some of the experts' tips on the issue. Robertson McQuilkin, former President of Columbia Bible College and Seminary, in his article "Should We Stop Sending Missionaries?" says:

"In most cases, sending just a portion of our surplus \$50-\$100 each month will provide support for one full-time national worker. The typical cost to send an American missionary family overseas is over \$50,000 a year the same cost as supporting 50 or more national workers. Think of what that money could do for the Kingdom of God! Admittedly, this rationale is appealing. Nationals have the language and the culture and they cost so much less. More than 140 organizations are now built on the premise of gathering and sending money, not people. But what about the dark half of the world where there are no 'nationals,' no witnessing church? At least a billion of the lost live among a people where there is no evangelizing church

movement, often no witness at all. For these, by definition, someone must leave home to reach them. If a foreigner doesn't go in from the outside they'll never hear the Gospel. The fundamental premise of the 'send money, not people' movement is misguided because there are no nationals to reach these billion people even if money were sent."

Jerry Rankin, president of the International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, puts it this way:

"It is a mistake to try to accelerate growth by an infusion of financial aid to build churches and support pastors. One thing inevitably occurs when North Americans subsidize the work of churches and pastors on the mission field: potential growth is stalled because of a mind-set that it can't be done unless an overseas benefactor provides the funds. Jealousy often develops among the pastors and churches that don't receive assistance toward those who develop a pipeline of support from the United States. In the long-term, support breeds resentment, especially if the support is not sustained indefinitely, because it creates a patronizing dependency. People are deprived of growing in faith, learning to depend on God and discovering that He is sufficient for all their needs."

Robertson McQuilkin has listed six warning signs in supporting nationals.

1. Believers learn to depend neither on God nor on themselves because they have no need to give sacrificially of their own resource.
2. Leaders become preoccupied with raising North American funds. On a trip I took to India I was overwhelmed by the many who "worked" me for a dollar connection.
3. They come to believe that the work can't be done without outside assistance, so why try?
4. Believers sue believers. In India, I was astounded to find few churches or ministries that weren't in the courts at war over property purchased using American dollars.
5. An independent and unaccountable higher class of Christian workers arises whose stylish life-styles are envied by "unconnected believers."
6. Recipients become ungrateful. The ingratitude can take a number of forms: "Sure, you gave us something, but look how much you still have;" or, "It's not yours anyway; you owe it to us."

Rick Wood, former editor of Mission Frontiers Magazine says:

"Many churches in the U.S. have bought into this scheme as a way of getting more 'bang for their missions buck.' But what they don't realize is that this 'bargain basement' approach to missions is going to blow up in their faces creating a dependency on the mission field to foreign funds that is deadly to the vibrant, reproducing church planting movements that we want to see within every people. Every church and every people has the

God-given privilege and responsibility of supporting its own ministry and cross-cultural outreach. Foreign money robs these peoples of the incentive to give of their lives and resources to support the ministries of their own churches.”

So isn't it better to send money? Well, obviously not always. The Great Commission still stands today as it did 2,000 years ago: Matt 28:19 "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" Jesus did not give a stipulation that says "unless you feel sending a check is better!"

“But isn't the mission field a dangerous place to be?”

The Israelites were faced with an interesting choice after leaving their slavery in Egypt. As they got to the edge of the land that God had told them to possess they began to count the cost of obedience. The land was inhabited by fierce, giant-size men! They found themselves questioning God's command, His promise and His deliverance from Egypt. All of a sudden disobeying God and returning to slavery seemed more appealing in light of the danger and certain death that awaited them. Here is their response: "Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" (Numbers 14:3). Keith Green explains:

“It is all a matter of our priorities - do we look at the temporary or the eternal in making our choices? It's true that you will probably be in more physical danger on the mission field than you would be in the suburbs of America, but that is part of the cost that we need to count when it comes to serving God. The question should not be, 'Will I be kept safe wherever I go?' but rather, 'What is on the Lord's heart for me to do?' If Jesus decided to go the way of least pain, He would have never gone to the cross. There is no place of greater blessing for you than in the center of God's will. You must stop to count the cost, but remember one thing - the privilege of serving God always outweighs the price.

This is only going to grow as an issue because of the increase in wars, threats of wars, kidnappings and terrorism. You must be mobilizing students to not turn back. The measure of a man is what it takes to stop him. What will it take to stop you? Are you setting the example? Take the students back to the Word, and look toward those who have gone before and made their life a living sacrifice. There is no promise of safety and the dangers are real, but His grace is sufficient for us.

“But I am not ready for that kind of sacrifice.”

This is the root of all excuses - abstaining from sacrificial living. For some people when they come to Christ they just Christianize the things they did before. Their logic goes something like this: "I was going to be a teacher, so now I guess I am a Christian teacher. I was going to be an engineer, so now I guess I am a Christian engineer." It is easy to just add Christ to our pre-existing plans. Those who come with this excuse have most likely fallen into this trap. Therefore, the mindset becomes "why would I want to go to

the mission field, that is serious sacrifice!” In II Corinthians 5:17 we read, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” Notice the key phrase, “the old has gone.” This means that all we desired and lived for under our lordship is done away with. Jesus becomes Lord to guide us in His agenda, not just offer us council about our agenda. This is the minimum, the entry level of commitment not an elite, super-spiritual commitment that few attain to. Jesus challenges us to consider the cost of following Him *before* salvation not *after*.

Luke 14:28-33 “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”

Erwin McManus, in his book *An Unstoppable Force*, discusses his experience in growing as a new Christian. After his decision to follow Christ and be saved he was faced with another altar call, a calling to Lordship. A few weeks later, there was another altar call, a calling to the ministry. After that, two more calls - a calling for home ministry and a calling to foreign ministry. He explains:

“So now I had discovered five levels of callings from God - a calling to be saved, a calling for Jesus to be Lord, a calling to ministry, a calling to home missions, and a calling to foreign missions.... Why are there so many levels of Christian calling in our contemporary Christian community? Where are they found in the biblical text? I have a strange suspicion that the nuances of these “callings” have less to do with theology and more to do with the condition of the church. Paul seemed to think there was only *one* calling. He writes to Timothy, ‘So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace’ (2 Timothy 1:8-9). The scriptures seem to simplify the process of calling. The one call is to lay your life at the feet of Jesus and to do whatever he asks.”

The student who approaches you with this issue is struggling with Christ’s Lordship. Challenge them to consider what happened at salvation and to Whom they belong. Ask them if Christ would be pleased with a lesser sacrifice than what He is calling for.

In Closing...

William Carey, Hudson Taylor, Cameron Townsend, C.T. Studd, Gladys Aylward and Amy Carmichael all had one thing in common – they had reasons not to go. Good reasons. But they all had another thing in common – they thought it a worthwhile cost to pay. They considered everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus their Lord, for whose sake they lost all things. Behind the student's excuse sits the same potential of the greats who have gone before. Be a living example of the supreme worth of Christ and be prepared to disarm any excuse that threatens it.