**THE CHALLENGE OF A MISSIONARY**

***I Thessalonians 5:11-13***

Sunday School Lesson

*Understanding Missions*

Week 4 – 5/13/2018

**Introduction:** As we continue our study in missions, this week’s lesson focuses on the challenges that missionaries face. As fellow laborers, we ought to be mindful of the struggles that missionaries go through and look for ways that we can help them in their ministry for the Lord. Too often, we only give our attention to the things and people who are right in front of us. Since the missionaries are out of sight and many miles away, we tend to keep them out of our minds as well. While it is a great blessing to give financial support to a missionary, we should not forget about them or assume that our Biblical responsibility is fulfilled through our giving alone.

1. A MISSIONARY HAS TO FACE MANY EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES. (GALATIANS 6:9)
2. **Notice that the missionary may struggle with being alone (Romans 11:1-4).** While the missionary is never truly alone, as he has the Lord and his family with him, he does still have to struggle with the loneliness of the mission field. We must also notice that the Devil loves to attack when someone is alone. This was the strategy that he took when he tried to attack Jesus in the wilderness (Luke 4), and it’s the same strategy that he employs on Christians. He wants to try to catch us during our weakest moments. This is why it is important for supporting churches to let missionaries know that they are not alone. It is good to remind those missionaries that there are people who are praying for them and who are here to help them. Ecclesiastes 4:10 tells us that it is good to have others to be there when we fall. A missionary, just like every other Christian, will have times of failure in his life. He needs to have people to pick him up during those times.
3. **Notice that the missionary may struggle with being impatient (Hebrews 5:11-14).** As we reviewed last week, most missionaries go to the field with a vision of seeing a great work done for God. While this is the right mentality that they should have, the reality is that the results do not always come in as quickly as one would hope. Additionally, having people attend the church is only half the battle. The other struggle is in seeing spiritual growth. In the New Testament, we see several times where a church was admonished for their slow spiritual growth. There’s little doubt that Paul struggled to control his frustration when it came to the church at Corinth. The problem that arises when we don’t see results as quickly as we would like is that the impatience ultimately turns into discouragement or frustration. One thing that we can do as Christians is pay attention to missionary updates and look for those who are starting to become discouraged. From there, we can reach out and encourage them to stay faithful to the work that God has given them.
4. **Notice that the missionary may struggle with being forgotten (Luke 12:5-7).** As mentioned in the introduction, it is very easy for supporting churches to forget about their missionaries. When I first reached out to our missionaries, it was disappointing to me that many of our missionaries were surprised to hear from me. Many of them told me that they rarely hear from any of their supporting churches. If it weren’t for the financial support coming in each month, they wouldn’t know whether some of the churches even still existed. In Luke 12, Jesus reminds us that our Heavenly Father never forgets about us. While this is where the missionary should draw his strength from, we should also let our missionaries know that they are not forgotten. The Bible encourages us that there is a great cloud of witnesses watching us. As people, none of us want to feel like we have been forgotten. We have an innate desire to be wanted and appreciated by others.
5. **Notice that the missionary may struggle with being fatigued (Galatians 6:7-9).** In Galatians 6, we are admonished not to grow weary in well doing. The Bible tells us that we will reap what we sow, and that we should sow to the Spirit and not to the flesh. If we sow to the Spirit, we will see the reaping of that. The challenge is that we do not get our reward for sowing until we stand before a righteous and just God (That’s our “due season.”). Dying to our flesh is a daily task that we have to perform. It is not an easy task by any means. It can become very tiring. To this end, there are missionaries and pastors who just get tired of the sacrificial life of ministry. For years, they’ve battled against feelings of loneliness, discouragement, and being forgotten. Sadly, they just get tired, and then they give in to the flesh. For some, they change their doctrine to make it easier, and for others, they just step away from the ministry altogether. The best thing that we can do to help a missionary, in this regard, is to just keep going in our own ministry. Let them see that the fight is going strong, and we need them to stay in the fight with us!
6. A MISSIONARY HAS TO FACE CHALLENGES FROM THE OPPOSITION. (ACTS 13)
7. **Notice that people do not want to lose their influence over others (Acts 13:6-12).** In Acts 13, Paul, John, and Barnabas arrive in the town of Paphos. While they are there, the deputy of the country wants to hear from them. Unfortunately, there was a false prophet who opposed them greatly. The false prophet did not want to lose his influence over this political figure. Even more so, the Devil himself (vs. 10) does not want to lose his influence over people. When missionaries go to a foreign field, they are very likely to face opposition from people whose influence is at risk. In some places, this may be opposition by a false religion, and in other places, it may be opposition by secular or political sources. While a country may have freedom of religion, it does not necessarily mean that everyone is going to welcome that missionary into their country.

1. **Notice that people do not want to have their normal way of life altered by others (Acts 13:13-52).** As people, we are creatures of habit. We like to stick to our routines and standard day-to-day activities. As a result, missionaries will often face opposition from people who just don’t want to consider a change in their lives. After Paul and Barnabas dealt with the false prophet, they preached a message unto the Jews at Antioch (in Pisidia). The Jews were comfortable with their usual rituals and practices in the synagogues. They did not want to hear what God had to say about it. This resulted in them casting the preachers out of their city. They also followed them and stoned them. Sinful people (which we all are) do not want to hear that their way of life is not right before the Lord.
2. A MISSIONARY HAS TO FACE MANY CULTURAL CHALLENGES. (I CORINTHIANS 9:19-23)
3. **Notice that the missionary may have to learn a new language (I Corinthian 14).** The purpose of the gift of tongues was to help the missionaries of the early church. God gave them the miraculous gift that allowed the listeners to understand the message in their own native tongue. Since God gave this gift, it is obvious that a language barrier is a great hindrance to a missionary’s work. Learning a second language can be a very difficult task. What people often don’t consider is the effectiveness of a language that a preacher needs to have. It is not as simple as learning the basics of another language. They have to engross themselves in it and learn how to master it in both writing and speaking. While some missionaries may utilize an interpreter, this is not nearly as effective as speaking the language directly. It greatly limits their ability to counsel and train their church members.
4. **Notice that the missionary may have to adapt greatly to a new culture (Acts 14:8-18; I Corinthians 9:19-23).** In Acts 14, we see Paul and Barnabas continuing their missions work in another city. While in the city, Paul heals a lame man. When the people of the city saw it, they wanted to worship Paul and Barnabas as one of their gods. The preachers tried to help the people understand that they were not gods, but the people had grown up believing in all types of false gods. Think of all the different types of cultures that Paul had to work with. He dealt with the Greeks and their desire for knowledge and wisdom. He dealt with the barbarians who wanted to worship him after he was bit by a snake. He worked with the Romans, the Jews, and many other people. He learned to deal with each group of people. This was certainly not an easy task. The same goes for the missionary. He has to find a way to adapt to the culture of an area without adapting the principles of the Word of God.

IV. A MISSIONARY HAS TO FACE CHALLENGES IN ORGANIZATION. (I CORINTHIANS 14:40)

A. **Notice that there is significant work in establishing a church legally (Matthew 22:21).** As Christians, we are instructed to work within legal means if at all possible. A missionary has the task of learning specific requirements in his given field and then working to properly set up the church. This can be a rather daunting task in some countries. There’s significant work involved in securing visas, work permits, or meeting with government officials. The struggle the missionary has is to not let this aspect of the work overwhelm him, especially early on in his ministry.

B. **Notice that there is sustained work in continuing the church (Ephesians 4).** One challenge that a missionary has is in maintaining a proper balance between the different aspects of church work. In many cases, the missionary is going to be the one doing all of the physical maintaining of the church. There is plenty to do weekly to maintain a church from a structural standpoint. The missionary must balance that challenge with his spiritual responsibility to study and pray.

**CONCLUSION**: We ought to pray for our missionaries and continually be thoughtful of the challenges that they are facing. We should look for ways to help them overcome any of the challenges mentioned in this lesson. The Lord will bless us as a church as we continue to have a heart and burden for lost souls and the laborers who lead them to Jesus.