

What Price Are You Willing to Pay?

Steven (Fanie) Loots – Bibles for Believers and Harvesters International Ministries, Aug 2007

When asked to do something difficult or even dangerous, most people expect to be paid. Sometimes, for a good cause, someone might volunteer service – as long as it doesn't cost them something. Few are willing to pay to do something for others – especially if the price is high or if it involves physical discomfort.

Getting involved in God's work can from time to time be difficult and even dangerous. It sometimes asks a price few are willing to pay. Whether called to full time service or merely going on a short term missions trip, of this you can be sure – there is a price involved. This can vary from the testing of your faith, or the level of your obedience to sacrificial giving of your time, talents and treasure. Doing God's will, will ask something of you.

Over the past few months Harvesters International Ministries received several teams on STM (short term mission) trips. On one of these, to Mazabuka in Zambia, a team member developed a thrombosis just before leaving for the USA. He and his wife had to remain behind while their team-mates jetted off home. In a strange country, in a strange hospital they had to deal not only with the physical problem but also had to field questions and concerns from their family back home who severely questioned their judgement in coming to Africa. Their families were justifiably concerned and I'm sure that this couple will be counselled to not return. Their willingness to serve God has had a high price.

Our next team consisted of twenty two intrepid Michiganders and Indianans. They came to Africa to join HIM's outreach to the Makua people of northern Mozambique. Their home churches have been sponsoring HIM's church planting efforts among this predominantly Muslim people group (94% Muslim). The work among the Makua has yielded wonderful fruit with over 400 churches being planted in just 2 years. The team came with the intention of working with 12 of the newly planted churches – teaching and mentoring evangelism to the local believers on a daily basis.

All of the team members were ready to go! They had spent months preparing – planning vacation time, saving and raising the needed funds, making arrangements for their families at home, getting all the documents ready and preparing themselves spiritually. Ahead of them lay several flights and hundreds of miles on the road. Waiting for them were South African teams who had gone in before them to set up camp, prepare the local churches and who would

provide the needed logistical support and transport. Also waiting were twelve churches – anxiously watching for their arrival.

And then – aviation chaos! Bad weather, broken planes, missed flights , lost luggage and administrative nightmares at the hands of disinterested airline officials – and they hadn't even left the USA yet. The team eventually arrived in Johannesburg on different flights over a period of three days – without their luggage – only to discover that there were no immediate connecting flights to Pemba. Finally, on the Tuesday night, almost a week after leaving home, they arrived at the campsite in Montepuez, Mozambique. Days late, exhausted and frustrated. The waiting churches were disappointed too.

But God! Despite the loss of crucial time, the discomfort (for those whose luggage never came) and strong opposition from chiefs and religious leaders God did amazing things. Several times during the enforced stopover in South Africa I had considered calling it all off – it seemed like too much hassle for too little time in the field. What made a difference was the incredible grace that each team member displayed. Despite this I wondered if it was worthwhile. But God! The team was willing to pay the price and God was willing to bless their work. In just five days of work almost 2,000 Muslims came to Christ and several new churches were planted. Many Christians were trained and mentored in evangelism and the testimony of Jesus was heralded throughout the region.

The exhausted group left for home rejoicing, only to be met by – you guessed it – aviation chaos!

I'm sure that many reading this have been on STM trips or other mission related activities and have been through much worse. Many who have served in missions can tell horror stories of their experiences. A number have paid a heavy price and some even the ultimate price – losing their lives or loved ones while in service of the King.

The fact is that serving God carries a price. Furthermore, that no matter how costly a price, it is always worthwhile.

Contemplating these difficulties our teams were facing and praying constantly for them, I wondered how we (HIM) could have made things easier, planned differently or taken steps to avoid the discomfort. At the same time I also happened to be working through the book of Acts. As the life of the Apostle Paul

became alive to me, the Lord highlighted some of the things Paul had to endure and the high price his obedience came at.

On his missionary journeys, Paul was mistrusted by the church (9:26), hated by the Grecian Jews – who then tried to kill him (9:29). He was opposed, maligned (13:45), persecuted (13:49), plotted against (14:5), stoned, dragged out of the city and left for dead (14:19), deserted by his friends (15:38), dragged before the authorities (16:19), stripped, beaten and flogged (16:22). Paul was thrown into prison and tied into the stocks (16:26), had a riot stirred up against him (17:5) and had to flee for his life several times. He was lied about in court (18:13) and caused an uproar. During this time Paul worked hard with his hands to supply his needs (20:34). He chose to do God's will even when all his friends and the church leadership disagreed (21:4, 13-14) despite knowing that his obedience to God would eventually lead to great hardship and even death (20:23).

In Jerusalem he was seized, dragged from the temple and his own people tried to beat him to death (21:31). Paul was arrested and dragged before the religious leaders (22:27). He appeared before the governor and then the king after being left to rot in prison for two years (24:27). Finally Paul was sent to Rome. After being released and later rearrested he was beheaded.

Paul's journeys were mostly on foot and sometimes by ship. His journey to Rome was the ultimate in disaster travel. The slow trip took at least seven months. Along the way the ship was caught in a storm and driven along by the wind for two weeks. During this time the passengers feared for their lives, did not eat and eventually tossed everything they could overboard including the ship's tackle and finally the food. They eventually ran aground and had to swim for their lives. Then to cap it all Paul was bitten by a snake. Your typical mission's trip?

Perhaps it comes as a surprise to believers when they discover that God is less interested in their personal comfort than He is in their willingness and obedience – and that often He tests our willingness and obedience by allowing severe physical discomfort. After all, Jesus promised to be with us, He did not promise that the road would be easy. The price we pay differs from person to person but it will never be more than the price Jesus paid to make us His.

We live in wonderful times with great opportunities for service. The fact that we can do "*short term*" mission trips is a miracle in itself. Modern day travel has brought missions within the grasp of most Christians – despite its perils (adventures?). Imagine what it was like when missionaries packed their coffins

when leaving for Africa- never expecting to come home alive. Today we can do so much more, in much less time and at an affordable cost. When considering the vast numbers of people going on STM trips each year we must conclude that these are mostly safe, generally comfortable and fairly inexpensive. The price is not too heavy. Occasional discomfort, waiting, lost time, infrequent mishaps, accidents and the rare serious injury or loss of life suggest that missions does not ask a huge price of us.

While there are very dangerous places for Christians on earth, at most STM trip destinations there is little active resistance to the Gospel or the preaching of the Gospel – short-termers are unlikely to cause a riot, be beaten, get arrested or be put to death. But this does not mean that there is no price to pay or that God may not ask of you to experience even these extremes.

What is amazing is the difference between how modern Christians and the early church differ in their attitude to discomfort, pain and even suffering. We have a great aversion to all things unpleasant, painful, dangerous and deadly. The early church saw these things as desirable when suffered for the Lord – an honour and a privilege. The response of the disciples to being flogged and publicly disgraced was: “The Apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.” (Acts 5:41) Today we would see a testimony of how fellow believers were spared suffering as the work of God and look sceptically at a returning missionary who was beaten, arrested and sent to prison – wondering what he did wrong to deserve God’s judgement, punishment or lack of protection.

The question is thus, do we still see suffering for the sake of our Lord as something worthwhile or as a price too high? In seeking comfort have we not lost the essential value of personal sacrifice in our service of the One who is worthy of my all. Is my personal comfort more important than lost souls? Who is the important one here –me or Christ, and who serves whom? Is God my personal Genie, popping up when it suites me to meet my every need and ensure my comfort at all times?

Perhaps we need again to make a commitment making Christ Lord and King. Reaffirming our position as servants and slaves, willing to serve at His pleasure – when and where it suites Him. Willing to endure, willing to suffer and willing to even die. After all - its all about Him. His Name, His honor and His Glory.