

Can Simple Farmers Be Missionaries?

by Brother Yang

We thank God for the many wonderful Christians around the world who have heard about and encouraged the vision of the Chinese Church to take the Gospel to the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist peoples.

We are constantly amazed at how people contact us enthusiastically, saying they want to be a part of this vision. Not everyone is enamoured by the thought of Chinese believers going as missionaries outside our borders however. One or two people have recently written that the house church believers of China, most of whom are from rural farming backgrounds, do not qualify to be missionaries because of their lack of education and finances.

Is this correct? Are we house church Christians in China wasting our time? Would we do better to forget about cross-cultural missionary work? We took these statements seriously, but after much prayer it became apparent to us that the weight of Scripture, Christian history and modern experience does not support this thinking.

Far from being the least qualified for the task of missionaries, Jesus specifically chose young men from farming and fishing backgrounds among his twelve disciples. Simon and his brother Andrew were busy casting their fishing nets into the lake when Jesus called them to follow. Thus two fishermen were the very first disciples Jesus chose. James and John were the next two called as disciples (see Matthew 4:18-22). They too were fishermen. When Jesus found them they were in their father's boat preparing to cast their nets.

Certainly there were professionals in his team as well, even Matthew the tax collector, but most were simple rural men who knew how to work with their hands. They were rough - especially the strong-willed Simon Peter - but Jesus looked past the rough exterior and could see a polished diamond inside.

These men formed the leadership of the first missionary era and "turned the world upside down" in their generation. The Apostle Paul, himself a tent maker, had a team of disciples with him at various times on his travels. His companions included the doctor Luke (Colossians 4:14) and Zenas, who was a lawyer (Titus 3:13), but there was also room for less sophisticated people, even for Onesimus the slave (Philemon 10).

All throughout history the Church of Jesus Christ has grown through the consecrated lives of committed men and

women, irrespective of their social, economic, or educational background. Peasants have testified before kings, and farmers have been used mightily by God to shake whole nations. Christians in Ireland do not care that St. Patrick was an enslaved 16-year-old shepherd boy. He was just the messenger. It was the message, the Gospel, that transformed the heathen Irish in one of the greatest revivals in history. At the start of *The Confession of St. Patrick*, he begins with these words: "I am Patrick, a sinner, most unlearned, the least of all the faithful, and utterly despised by many."

Yet God used him to change the course of a nation forever.

In the Old Testament, God once chose a shepherd boy as King of Israel! The way of the world is always to look at human credentials as the prerequisite for success. We look for the strongest, most handsome, most eloquent, thinking that God's work can be accomplished through human effort.

God, however, clearly uses a different set of scales when he weighs a person. He looks at the character and heart of the individual. Even the great prophet Samuel used human thinking when he saw Eliab. "Samuel saw Eliab and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord.'" But the Lord

said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'" (1 Samuel 16:6-7).

A university degree has never been a prerequisite for missionary activity. Certainly secular qualifications can help a Christian who commits them to the Lord's service, but what mostly counts is a call from God and a heart of passion for the Lord Jesus.

When Peter and John were hauled before the Sanhedrin, the religious leaders could not understand how the two disciples of Jesus could speak with such authority and clarity.... "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

Those among us who are also "unschooled and ordinary" need not be discouraged - God has not despised the simple farmers and labourers throughout history, and he continues to use them today!

