

## Hard Work – Overwhelming Responsibilities

Having surmounted enormous obstacles and years of preparation, Adoniram Judson arrived on the mission field. Seven hard years followed. All he had to show for it was one convert. It was about time he moved on to something more beneficial – peddling hair curlers at a Bald is Beautiful convention, developing waterproof pianos for people who sing in the shower, fitting parachutes to birds that are afraid of heights – anything but trying to win souls in Berma.

One day a man came to his house looking for work and instead found Jesus, his Saviour. Another pin prick. But this one burst the balloon. The new convert became a powerful evangelist. Dozens, then hundreds, then thousands turned to the Lord. Within a century, over a quarter of a million Christians directly or indirectly owed their spiritual lives to Adoniram Judson.

But that's eternity's view. Years after that key conversion, Adoniram's life still seemed a waste. He was thrown into a death prison and chained to a granite block. Every night guards, ex-criminals themselves, hoisted his ankle fetters high above his head so that only his head and shoulders touched the ground. As he lay in appalling filth, almost every thought produced a new reason for despair. There were then only eighteen converts. Surely most, perhaps all, would fall away or be killed under the new outbreak of persecution. Years of struggle had produced a lone manuscript of a Burmese New Testament and his wife had smuggled it into prison. Any moment it could be discovered and destroyed. His relations with fellow missionaries had been marred by hurtful clashes. He had buried his only child. His own life hung by a thread. He feared for his darling, pregnant wife.

'I came to bring life,' he moaned, 'and have brought nothing but death.'

After a year and a half of cruelty he was finally released. A brief reunion with his precious wife ended with him having to wrench himself from her to assist in political negotiations. Weeks turned to months. Before he could return to his wife, she was dead. Months later, death tore from him his only remaining child, the baby he had battled so hard to save. After two more years of mental deterioration, still numb with guilt over being absent when his wife most needed him, he dug a grave and lingered by it for days on end, his mind churning with morbid thoughts. 'God is to me the Great Unknown,' he concluded. 'I believe in him, but I find him not.'

The mighty Lord hauled him up. He became one of the most admired missionaries of all time.

Sadly, not everyone slogs through the tough ground-breaking years. David Flood's solitary convert was just a child. When David's wife died, discouragement won. Leaving his baby daughter, Aggie, with a missionary couple, young David left Africa – and the Lord. After the collapse of his second marriage he took in a mistress. Alcohol, poverty, illness and degradation tightened their deadly strangle-hold.

As his abandoned daughter grew, married and served the Lord, she often thought of the father she had never known. He was 77 when Aggie finally stood at his grimy bedside, ignored the

stench, and hugged him. Her love and Christ's power brought David back to the One who had moved him to 'waste' his life in Africa. Aggie also brought startling news. That little convert he had left in Africa had built on the foundation David and his wife had laid and the entire tribe of 600 people had come to Christ.

It's not only missionaries who are allowed to have lean years.

### **THE PAIN AND THE GLORY**

Hounded by defeat,  
Immersed in gloom.  
Confounded by a curse,  
Scorned and spurned.  
Haunted by despair,  
Mocked by words of doom.  
My eyes may fill with tears,  
But not with dread or fear.  
This grub, wings will sprout.  
This down-trodden worm will soar;  
Transformed by redemptive power,  
Set free by the Lord of all.  
No one sees it yet:  
The secret's heaven-kept.  
They mock and jeer  
They do not know;  
Success is slow, but it is sure;  
Though it tarry, it will come.  
All Father touches turns to gold.  
It matters not what others say,  
The winning's done;  
Like Father, like son!  
Founded on his Word;  
Embalmed by love.  
Surrounded by his arms;  
Washed and warmed.  
Granted all I need,  
Buoyed by thoughts above:  
From fear I find release,  
Becalmed by heaven's peace.

The shadow of his affliction fell across his life like a black and bottomless chasm. Reeling under hellish torment, bereft of all his children, cruelly stripped of his reputation, all of his possessions gone, Job coveted death. As far as the eye could see, there was nothing ahead but pain, accusations and despair. Job had nothing to live for. (Job 3:1-26; 6:9, 11) Or so everyone thought.

Before him lay joy and honour, a long and fruitful life, double his past prosperity and the fathering of a superb new family. (Job 42:11-17; compare Job 1:2-3) Job had everything to live for.

Like vine branches, we are not continually laden with fruit. That would be unnatural. (Ecclesiastes 3:1) For a significant portion of its life, a grapevine is nothing but a dry, twisted stick; fruitless, useless for shade, worthless as timber; to all appearances fit only to be ripped from the ground and reduced to ashes. Yet those barren times are as vital in the life of the vine, as the seasons of fruit.

If spring could tip-toe passed nature without stirring it from its winter slumber; if the sun could slip through the sky without dispelling the night; if rain could fall to the ground without bringing life to the desert – only then should you fear dry times, dark times, lean times. Though you feel as useless as a fur coat in a heat-wave, the time will come when your warmth is treasured. For everything there is a season.

We could stock a library with stories of spectacularly unsuccessful men and women who eventually sparked massive moves of God. Many closed their eyes in death without seeing the fruit their labours finally produced.

No matter what we think of his views, it is staggering to realize that Søren Kierkegaard's writings slept for almost a century after his death until translated into English and suddenly stunning the world. And consider the Jim Elliots of this world whose apparently untimely deaths have inspired countless thousands to take up the baton and run in their stead. Though they died seemingly at the very outset of their life's work, the final result was beyond what a dozen lifetimes could achieve. Still more tantalizing are heaven's best-kept secrets—triumphs by people we have never heard of, or achievements our slow minds cannot adequately appreciate.

Nonetheless, God established the pattern millenniums ago: Sarah knew nothing but barrenness for ninety distressing years, yet became the ancestress of multiplied millions.

At this very moment, the Lord could be replaying in someone's mind heaven's recording of a conversation you had with that person years ago. You've forgotten the incident, but God is still using it. What you thought were normal words were Spirit-powered. You don't feel the warm glow that would be yours if you knew those words were still echoing through the chambers of someone's mind, but face it: results mean more to you than elusive feelings.

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