

William Carey: Becoming Like the Father of Modern Missions

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William Carey lived in a unique time in missions history and, because of his commitments, changed the way the Church thought about missions. Though times have changed, we have the opportunity to apply his main strengths to our own lives and so glorify God in much the same way Carey did. How can you become like the Father of Modern Missions?

I. Background

A. *Birth and Early Years:*

1. This morning we will take a brief look at this choice servant who came to be known in time as the "Father of Modern Missions."
2. William Carey was born in 1761 in a remote village in Northamptonshire, England. At the time of his birth John and Charles Wesley were at the pinnacle of their influence and George Whitfield was preparing for his sixth journey to the Americas.
3. At the age of fourteen William was apprenticed as a shoemaker with Clarke Nichols. Cobbler John Warr, who was a fellow apprentice, was one of those great unknowns who led a person to Christ whose name would be remembered above his own.
4. Soon after his conversion, William Carey began to speak at various dissenting churches and soon felt called to pastor among the Baptists. If Carey's future success had been judged by his early days in preaching, he would have been deemed hopeless for the ministry. He was never considered a good speaker.
5. His first year at Olney was so unimpressive that the church refused to ordain him.
6. Carey often said of himself that his one great strength was that he was a "plodder". He may not have had the greatest skills but he had extraordinary tenacity. So, the young preacher persevered and was finally ordained. His next ten years were served first as bi-vocational and then full-time pastor.
7. In 1781 Carey married Dorothy Plackett. He was only 19 and she was 25. Though they were married for 26 years.
8. As a pastor, Carey also worked as a schoolteacher. While serving in that capacity, and having read the travelling adventures of Captain Cook, he designed a shoe-leather globe to teach his students about geography. It is said that at times while he was teaching his eyes would fall on that globe. Soon Carey would be weeping, crying out, "And these are pagans, pagans!"
9. Through his association with [Andrew Fuller](#) and others, Carey began to formulate a distinct sense of his calling to missions from God. Sadly, Carey met a great deal of opposition to begin with concerning foreign missions.

10. In 1792 Carey wrote [An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen](#). This would become the Magna Charta for the modern mission. It was also in that year that he preached his famous sermon, "Expect great things. Attempt great things." By the end of that same day the Northamptonshire Baptist Association adopted a resolution penned by Andrew Fuller:

- a) "Resolved, that a plan be prepared against the next minister's meeting at Kettering, for forming a Baptist Society for propagating the gospel among the heathen."
- b) With Carey's sermon and Fuller's resolution, the modern mission movement was born.

B. Carey's Enquiry

- a) Section One: An Enquiry whether the Commission given by our Lord to his Disciples be not still binding on us.
- b) Section Two: Containing a short Review of former Undertakings for the Conversion of the Heathen.
- c) Section Three: Containing a Survey of the Present State of the World.
- d) Section Four: The Practicability of Something being done, more than what is done, for the Conversion of the Heathen.
- e) Section Five: An Enquiry into the Duty of Christians in general, and what means ought to be used, in order to promote this good work.
- f) Summary: Carey urged on the church missions as the duty of the church.

C. Carey's Choice: William Carey was chosen by the new missionary society to head to India with the Gospel.

1. Along with his associate, a Doctor Thomas, William Carey and his family arrived in the city of Calcutta in 1793. Dr. Thomas was a terrible money manager and they were quickly forced to move 30 miles out into the countryside.
2. Dorothy Carey
 - a) At 19, Carey married Dorothy, who was more than five years older than him. She bore him seven children, three of whom died in childhood. The remaining four became missionaries themselves. Dorothy broke down mentally after the death of their son Peter and never recovered, dying about 10 years later. Carey remarried once, and then a third time after 13 years.
3. Move to Serampore: Carey spent the first seven years without a convert. In December of 1800, Carey baptized his first Hindu and by 1821 the missionaries had baptized over 1400 new Christians.

4. Translation Work:

5. On June 9, 1834, William Carey left this earth at the age of 73. At his death he had requested the words of an Isaac Watts hymn be written on his tombstone: "A wretched, poor, and helpless worm, On Thy kind arms I fall." The humble shoemaker who once preached, "*Expect great things from God, Attempt great things for God,*" was ushered into the presence of His glorious Savior.

II. What Can We Learn to Become Like the Father of Modern Missions?

A. *He was a man of studied conviction, no matter what was cultural, popular, common or advantageous to him materially.*

1. He was, first of all, a "man of the Book." He was greatly influenced by a disciple of the mystic William Law, yet was restrained by Laws "seeming trust of intuition beyond the written Word, whereas Carey was persuaded that, not by transcending Scripture, but by diligent and dutiful ascertainment and appropriation of its truth could God reliably be known. He resolved to master what was written, to make himself a man of the Book." (Carey, 9)

a) He did not only read the Bible, however. For his five months sailing to India as well as his early days on the field, Jonathan Edwards' writings, and David Brainerd's diary, which Edwards had edited, were regulars for him (George, 95).

2. This led to his choosing his ministry among the Congregationalist dissenters, and particularly the Baptists

a) We must understand that his grandfather and father were both schoolmasters, and Britain had passed the "Test and Corporation Acts" which required all paid officers of the State to be members of the Church of England. Also, one had to be an Anglican if they wanted to be military officers and to graduate from universities.

b) Through the witness of his co-apprentice John Warr, Carey turned from his sin and trusted Christ as his savior, committing himself "to depend upon a crucified savior for pardon and salvation, and to seek a system of doctrines from the Word of God" (George 8).

c) Carey began to study the nature of Biblical baptism. Continuing study of the Bible brought him to the conclusion that total immersion of a believer as the right mode. He sought out John Ryland Sr. of the Northampton Particular Baptist Church for advice, and he gave him a pamphlet on the subject. On October 7, 1783, John Ryland Jr. baptized William Caret,

3. Carey was an avid supporter of the abolitionist cause, even when slavery was publicly acceptable

a) During Carey's early years the slave trade was in full force. The London papers

actually advertised children for sale. S. Pearce Carey writes, "The Friends were the first remonstrants. Then the Baptists. Carey from his conversion was fierce against this shame. His sisters never heard him pray without reference to this traffic 'so inhuman and accursed.' When Parliament allowed the trade to continue, "His own response was to abandon the use of sugar, that he might cleanse his hands of blood." (Carey, 8)

4. This led to questioning the status quo regarding the lack of diligence in using "means" to take the gospel to the heathen

- a) In correction to prevailing philosophy: His early years were during the latter years of John Wesley and George Whitfield. He saw the power of the gospel transform lives in spite of and in correction to the rationalism of his day.
- b) In correction of prevailing theological extremes. "The pulpit doctrine of his denomination was extravagantly predestinarian." In contradiction to this and John Ryland Sr's comment, Carey's friend Andrew Fuller wrote *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation.*"
- c) In correction to apathy concerning the heathen, he had to "not just apply the match to the tinder, but to prepare the tinder itself. When he woke to the missionary vision, he found to his amazement all his fellow Christians blind. He had to create the desire which at length created the Mission, to provoke the demand of which he became the supply. [As he said] 'going at length against every dictate of common sense, every calculation of prudence, and all but universal opinion, because in the solitary sanctuary of his brooding soul and entreaty kept sounding from destitute heathendom.'" (Carey, 13).

B. He was a man of humility stemming from a biblical self-assessment

- 1. Sometimes he was discouraged by his own sinfulness
 - a) (from his journal Aug20, 1793) "I have reason to lament over the barrenness of Soul- and am sometimes much discouraged for if I am as dead and stupid, how can I expect to be of any use to the Heathen?"
- 2. No one sensed his inadequacies for the tasks before him more than Carey. Early in his ministry he wrote to his father:
 - a) "I see more and more of my own insufficiency for the great work I am called to. The truths of God are amazingly profound, the souls of men infinitely precious, my own ignorance very great and all that I do is for God who knows my motives and my ends."
- 3. His humility was expressed in his seeing himself as following in a train of missionaries
 - a) From his Enquiry: "But none of the moderns have equaled the Moravian Brethren in this good work; they have sent missions to Greenland, Labrador, and several of the West-Indian Islands, which have been blessed for good. They have likewise sent to Abyssinia, in Africa, but what success they have had I cannot tell."

b) He concludes his *Enquiry*: "What a treasure, what a harvest must await such characters as Paul, and Elliot, and Brainerd, and others, who have given themselves wholly to the work of the Lord. ... Surely it is worthwhile to lay ourselves out with all our might, in promoting the cause and kingdom of Christ."

C. *He was a man who clearly saw his place in the local church and submitted himself to its direction*

1. He was called to a pastorless Baptist church in Moulton in 1785, but the church was unable to pay him a living wage, so he continued working as a cobbler as well.
2. He joined the church in Olney, which traced its beginnings back to John Bunyan, seeking ordination. Olney was also the location of the church pastored by John Newton and assisted by William Cowper. After preaching in 1785 a sermon he described "as crude and weak as anything could be, which is called, or has been called, a sermon" the church in Olney made a resolution that "he should be allowed to go on preaching at those places where he has been sometimes employed, and that he should engage again on suitable occasions for some time before us, in order that farther trial may be made of his ministerial gifts" (George 19)
3. Carey returned to Moulton, preaching there for the next year. Following that, the church in Olney granted him ordination unanimously.

D. *He was a man who cultivated God's heart in himself and others for the whole world*

1. As mentioned, he read when it came out, *Journal of Captain Cook's Last Voyage*, as well as other books on geography, travel and the British Empire. One biographer wrote that "from his cottage window, he looked out on the uttermost parts of the earth." (George, 21)
2. Andrew Fuller tells of travelling down to visit Carey and seeing an assemblage of homemade maps with Carey's handwritten statistics of populations on the maps.
3. This all led to Carey's writing of his *Enquiry* and presenting this to the minister's fraternal in 1792.
4. He cultivated it in others too—he was the original missions mobilize. Fuller writes that Carey "pressed his case" that the heathen were not mere numbers, but persons—eternal souls destined to live forever in the bliss of heaven or the darkness of hell—to Fuller, Sutcliff and Ryland individually until they were each convinced.
5. He had a tremendous burden for individual souls—"The thought of a fellow creature perishing forever should rouse all our activity and engage all of our powers . . . the matter is desperate. It calls for us to live and act alone for God. . . [Let us work] with indefatigable industry, till we can't find a soul that's destitute of Christ in all the world." (George 28)

E. *He was a man of Persevering Faithfulness*

1. He called himself a "plodder"
 - a) He wrote to his nephew, Eustace, "Eustace, if after my removal anyone should think it worth his while to write my life, I will give you a criterion by which you may

judge its correctness. If he gives me the credit for being a plodder, he will describe me justly. Anything beyond this will be too much. I can plod. I can persevere in any pursuit.”

2. He was a man full of faith-this expression culminated in the sermon he preached in May of 1792 from Isaiah 54:2-3- “Expect Great Things, Attempt Great Things.”
3. At the end of that meeting, Fuller made the proposal- “Resolved, that a plan be prepared against the next minister’s meeting at Kettering, for forming a Baptist society for propagating the gospel among the heathen.”
4. In October of 1792 they gathered in Kettering, where Fuller pastored, and just a few months after Fuller’s wife had died. Carey was 31 years of age. Fuller was 38. They formed the “Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the gospel among the heathen.”
5. After hearing from a Mr. Thomas, missionary to Bengal, the society decided to take him as their missionary, and there, according to the minutes, they asked Carey to join him, to which he answered in the affirmative.”

F. He was a man who surrounded himself with co-laborers as good and trusted friends

1. Andrew Fuller, John Ryland Jr, Samuel Pearce and others were his trusted friends, later including his coworkers in the Serampore Trio—William Ward and Joshua Marshman.
2. Andrew Fuller, good friend of William Carey, wrote from the evening of Carey’s declaration of going to India, “we saw there a gold mine in India, but it seemed almost as deep as the center of the earth. Who will venture to explore it? “I will go down,” said Mr. Carey to his brethren, “but remember that you must hold the ropes.” We solemnly engaged to do so; nor while we live, shall we desert him.”

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