

PRAYING BIBLICALLY

for your missionary.

PROTECTION

By Alan Patterson

The world is a dangerous place, especially for a Christian. Recall the battles, enemies, and temptations that Pilgrim faced in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* as he made his way to the Celestial City. In our last issue we considered some of the dangers as we noted that the fearless Apostle Paul asked prayer for protection, and he did this not once, but twice. Both of those contexts and time frames were different, teaching us that protection for the missionary is an ongoing need. He requested that his friends specifically pray for his deliverance from unreasonable and wicked men, men who did not have faith and often violently opposed the faith. But prayer for the missionary's physical protection does not exhaust the application of these verses. The missionary also needs God's help in dealing with opposition that affects him spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. Consider this astounding admission from one who works with missionaries in a large missions organization.

“About one third of our missionaries are emotionally healthy and making a good impact on the field. About one third are marginally healthy and not doing any specific damage on the field, but they are not really productive. The remaining one third are very unstable emotionally and are doing more damage than doing good.”¹

This article identifies neither the speaker nor the missions agency, but clearly this situation is not what most people would expect from a group of missionaries—two thirds are either not productive or are “doing more damage than doing good!” What is going on here? Are the majority of our missionaries so emotionally and spiritually vulnerable that they are doing no good on their fields? Frankly, I hope not, and I do not think that is the case with GFA missionaries. But the fact is, missionaries face incredible attacks on their emotional and spiritual equilibrium.

The history of some of the finest missionaries provides further proof of the fierceness of the spiritual and mental battles that missionaries face. William Carey's wife, Dorothy, went reluctantly to India. Then there came the pressures of caring for four young children, adjusting to a harsh, hot climate and totally foreign culture, not to mention dealing with financial difficulties and a hostile British government. These pushed her over the brink. For 12 years until her death, Carey had to deal with an insane wife, one who had to be restrained from making repeated attacks on her husband's life.

Adoniram Judson, America's first official foreign missionary, was so distraught over the death of his wife, a death coming on the heels of his own imprisonment and torture, that he camped by her grave in the jungle for a month. His friends feared he would not come out of his depression. Thankfully, he did. But if stalwart missionaries had such struggles, we can be sure that servants today are no less susceptible. The truth is that Paul himself had the same battles, for he had the experience of no rest for his flesh, being troubled on every side, battling fightings without and fears within (2 Cor. 7:5).

Pray that God would do for each missionary what He did for Paul, for we read: “Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (2 Cor. 7:6). Don't overlook the fact that what comforted the depressed Paul was a very practical matter—the arrival of Titus with some good news about the Corinthians' response. God has many ways to lift the spirits and protect the minds of his workers. Pray that He would protect them in the ways appropriate to their individual needs.

¹ Evan Parks, “Challenges and Opportunities for Mental Health Providers,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 46, no. 2 (2010): 174.

