



## Barriers to Missions 101

### Fear and Comfort: Obstacles to Recruiting for Missions

Greg H. Parsons



Once we are old enough to realize that our parents can't protect us from everything, we can tend toward worry and fear. Whether it is the high school girl who fears rejection if she is not invited to the prom or the natural fear of seeing a bear (not in the zoo), all of us have that human tendency.

September 11 forced a new level of fear upon us—new to most Americans that is. While much of the world has lived in a state of vulnerability, we didn't. And we didn't know it.

It may be that recent events, global issues like war, or cultural shifts around us, have us more on edge than normal. The airline industry is a barometer for how the masses are feeling. Until flights are full and airline schedules are built back up, we all sense things are not back to "normal." While "the masses" are clearly impacted, what about those of us who have trusted our lives to Christ—are we as prone to fear?

Recently, I've heard of a few short-term (and longer) outreach programs to China have been canceled because of SARS. Right now, the chances of dying of SARS in China are 1 in 3.5 million! Hong Kong it is 1 in 24,000. If SARS is Satan's latest tinkering to bring all possible evil that he is allowed, he



*Rev. Greg Parsons is General Director of the U.S. Center for World Mission. He's been on staff at the USCWM for 20 years.*

seems to be successful again—not just because today, some 8421 people have or have had it or that 784 have died, as painful as that is to them and their families. Satan has succeeded because of the fear that is imbedded in the hearts of many of God's children, fueled by this new threat. Fear that keeps us home.

The government of China has asked one American I know to leave—perhaps using SARS as an excuse to get people out. There are a couple of provinces you would want to avoid for a while. But I still ask: why would ministries close outreach programs down? Answer: people either (1) aren't signing up to go, and/or/because; (2) parents are saying no.

---

## Are we now more interested in our children getting a good job, settling down and having a normal life? Will normal ever be normal again?

---

I've heard of the latter for years. Just yesterday a young man asked for prayer because he is wanting to major in Linguistics instead of Law or Medicine (which his parents want). Years ago, a relative of mine was working for a major company and toyed with the idea of working for them in Russia to share his faith. His mother, a committed Christian, said there was no way her adult son was going to Russia.

Perhaps we will not see the breakthroughs we pray about until there is a releasing of young people by their families and churches at new levels. The Student Volunteer Movement really started by the prayers of moms at home praying that their kids would make a difference in the spiritual needs of the world.

Are we now, it would seem, more interested in our children getting a good job, settling down and having a normal life? Will normal ever be normal again?

Risks should indeed be evaluated to the value of the goal, not the probability of success, as Ralph Winter noted years ago. If I take the risk of sky diving, the goal of "just doing it" or overcoming fear has to be weighed against the risk of injury. While some in missions may simply be the risk-taking types, many of us are far more cautious about physical risk with no eternal value.

Jesus told Paul he would suffer. Paul said he, in effect, beat his body into submission to the physically trying work to which God had called him. The writer of Hebrews notes:

"But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings..." (Hebrews 10:32)

For them, great affliction was part of the task. Like Paul, they must have said:

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed..." (2 Cor. 4:7-9)

Part of the reason we may not see the power of God more is because we don't want to be earthen vessels—used by God however he wishes. We kind of like things made of silver and gold. Or perhaps it's just fear. Why take the risk if we can choose comfort? 🌐