

## Why Did Paul Make Tents?

The church needs thousands of Christian professional people to finish evangelizing the world, like engineers, scientists, business people, health care workers, athletes, agriculturists, computer technicians, media specialists and educators of all kinds—tentmakers who can integrate work and witness in the Twenty-first century as the Apostle Paul did in the First century.

But how much did the Apostle Paul actually work at tentmaking? How much did he receive in donor gifts? Why did he do manual labor at all? Is his strategy applicable in our modern world? Before we examine these questions, we must consider what contemporary tentmakers do and why so many more are needed. We will consider first the practical rationale for modern tentmaking and then Paul's timeless reasons.

### Who is a tentmaker?

Tentmakers are missions-motivated Christians who support themselves in secular work as they do cross-cultural evangelism on the job and in free time. They may be business entrepreneurs, salaried professionals, paid employees, expenses-paid voluntary workers, or Christians in professional exchange, funded research, internship or study abroad programs. They can serve at little or no cost to the church.

Regular missionaries, on the other hand, receive donor support channeled through a mission agency or church. They are perceived as religious workers even if they use skills like nursing or teaching, because they work under the auspices of Christian institutions.

In between these two equally excellent ministry models are hybrids—all of them valid as long as they are open and honest. Some tentmakers supplement a low salary with modest donor gifts, and some

missionaries take part-time work in a secular institution like a school or university, for extra support or for contact with non-believers. Mission agencies send some of their personnel to enhance their organizational credibility. God leads some Christians to alternate between tentmaking and donor support at different times.

Unfortunately, most Christians with jobs abroad are not tentmakers. They are people who had little or no ministry at home and crossing an ocean did not change that. They attend an international church of their own compatriots—Americans join an English-language congregation. But few Christian expatriates seek to evangelize local citizens or third country guest workers in their new host country. Probably less than one percent are tentmakers.

A major misconception in mission circles is that tentmakers' jobs leave little time and energy for ministry. Christian workers constantly ask me, "Didn't you find it frustrating to spend so many hours on a secular job and to have so little time left over for God?" But I believed that all my time belonged to God! He had led me to a secular, bilingual school in Lima, Perú, and then to another in Sao Paulo, Brazil. He gave me an exciting ministry with teachers, elementary and high school students and their upper class Peruvian and Brazilian families. Besides this there were school nurses, janitors, bus drivers and cooks. This ministry centered around my job but spilled over into my personal life, through hospitality and home Bible studies.

In my free time I did teaching and training in local churches and started university fellowships. Campus work became my main ministry for thirty years, pioneering IVCF-IFES student movements in Perú and Brazil, and later in Portugal and Spain, and training students and staff in a number of other countries.

My ministry was as full-time when I had full-time employment as it was at later period when I received donor support. Because I integrated work and witness!

### **What ministries are done?**

Dan taught linguistics in an Arab university and did a translation of the New Testament into the language of five million Muslims who had never had it before! He was unable to live in their homeland, so he got a job in a country where thousands of them were guest workers.

Jim, an engineer, pastored the lay leaders of a dozen house churches in a very restrictive Arab country where Christians may not meet openly. He led them in preparing their weekly sermons and praying together.

Ken, a high school science teacher was invited to preach every third Sunday in a village church in Africa. Don, a graduate student of Hindu culture and religion in India, worked in a local church and did guest teaching in a nearby seminary. Greg, a university English instructor helped start a Christian publishing venture in a Middle Eastern country. Mary taught writing and helped local Christians produce literature in East Asia. High school teacher Nora, did script writing and program production for a Christian radio station in Africa. Nan, a professional violinist in a southern European symphony orchestra helped local churches improve their music. English teachers in China gave hours of care to children in a nearby orphanage. Many educators do campus ministries in the universities or schools where they are employed. Some tentmakers minister to businessmen, or women, or children, or slum dwellers or prisoners. Many do health care or family counseling. Tentmakers can bring professional expertise to many ministries. It is ideal to start new ministries and train local people to continue them when you have to leave.

Tentmakers' main work is evangelism on the job. Their secular positions (or study programs) are not an inconvenience that robs time from their main goal of evangelism, but are the necessary God-given contexts in which the evangelism takes place. Evangelism in a vacuum rarely produces much.

Low-key fishing evangelism is most appropriate in spiritually hostile environments. Christians use bait to fish out the seekers from among the indifferent or hostile people around them. They live out the Gospel in an attractive, godly, non-judgmental way. They demonstrate the joy of knowing God and hope even in suffering. They practise personal integrity, do quality work and develop caring relationships—all under unrelenting scrutiny. Because they are not perfect, they are quick to apologize and to admit that they are still learning to please God.

Their lifestyle constitutes bait. But without words exemplary lives confuse people. Their verbal witness is essential. In a context of friendly and caring relationships tentmakers tactfully insert appropriate comments about the Lord into secular conversations. They learn to drop tiny spiritual bombshells in a casual, natural way—as though everyone would agree. Their lives and words are bait which draws nibbles from spiritually hungry people. The seekers ask questions.

Fishing evangelism is not a structured activity but a natural way of relating to people. We find joy in explaining the gospel to people who ask, knowing we are not intruding on the seekers' privacy nor interrupting them at an inconvenient time. It is the seekers who pace the initial conversations with their questions. Often we say too much too soon. Their questions show us what to say. They reveal their felt needs, hurts, hang-ups, obstacles to faith and which truths they lack or misunderstand.

Paul and Peter both explained evangelism as eliciting the right questions from seekers and being ready to answer them. Both apostles have the workplace in mind. (Col. 4:5,6, 1 Peter 3:14-16). When no one asks, it means that nothing in the Christian's speech or conduct suggests that God is worth knowing. There is no bait. But a right kind of bait exists for every kind of fish—that which touches the seeker's deepest longings.

Christians need never fear questions, not even difficult ones. They should evangelize as learners, not as authorities. They can say, "Let me think about this until tomorrow, so I can give you a clear answer." Seekers' questions also provide the opening to look at Scripture. The tentmaker can say, "I'm still learning about my faith, but would you like to see what Jesus himself said about this subject?" Then pull out a small Testament and do a five-minute study on an appropriate passage.

This approach is ideal for workplace or campus. When you see the same people daily, the first conversations about God must not close the door to subsequent conversations. The goal is to keep people asking for more as they are ready.

This approach is also ideal for spiritually hostile countries. Tentmakers fish out the seekers without arousing the hostility of others. Private conversations spill over into free time. These lead to evangelistic Bible studies that grow into discipleship Bible studies, and then into house churches. It is ideal for church planting.

Tentmakers work in teams. Tentmakers should never work alone but in fellowship and accountability groups. They enlist friends and churches at home to pray. In their new host countries they may work in tentmaker teams or with national churches or as members of tentmaker sending agencies or regular mission agencies. Expatriate churches are good if they do not distract tentmakers from the local people, language and culture.

## **Why is tentmaking needed?**

Following are nine of the reasons why tentmaking is important if we wish to see the church of Jesus Christ planted in every people group.

- 1) It provides entry into hostile countries. About 80% of world population, including most unreached peoples, live in countries that do not allow Christians in as missionaries.
- 2) It provides natural, sustained contact with non-believers in restrictive and open countries. This is essential for winning them. Tentmakers relate easily to their professional counterparts abroad.
- 3) It conserves scarce mission funds for missionary ministries that must have full support, at a time of rising costs worldwide and an often uncertain dollar.
- 4) It multiplies our personnel. Tentmaking is our best hope for an adequate missions force. There will never be enough paid religious workers. Professional lay people who witness in the workplace add a great resource to world evangelism, which was initially a lay movement.
- 5) It supplements Christian radio & TV by incarnating the gospel for millions now able to hear it. The gospel must be seen as well as heard. Tentmakers fish out listeners, disciple them and establish fellowships.
- 6) It can reduce the attrition rate of missionaries who do not finish their first term or return for a second one (30%). People who apply for donor-supported regular missionary service after supporting themselves through the language and culture learning period are tried and proven. They are likely to last because they know the life to which they are returning.
- 7) It legitimizes mission agencies in open countries whose governments must justify their presence to hostile constituents.

Mission agencies gain favor with governments when some of their members use their nation-building skills in secular institutions.

8) It is ideal for emerging mission agencies in new sending countries which cannot follow our Western model of donor support because they do not have the funds or cannot legally send funds abroad.

9) It makes use of today's vast global job market which God has engineered to help us finish world evangelization. Dare we ignore hundreds of thousands of well-paid job openings world-wide while false religions and cults take advantage of them to spread their heresies?

But Paul, the great church-planter of the First century, gave us even stronger reasons for our tentmaking in the Twenty-First century. His timeless reasons will become more important as we near the end of history. Before looking at them we need to consider what financial options Paul had, how much he actually worked, what funds he received and why he worked at all.

### **What financial options did Paul have?**

He mentions three. 1) He could charge his listeners and his converts, the way many itinerant philosophers did. He rejects this option outright. 2) He could receive funds from friends and older churches. 3) He could earn to support himself.

In 1 Cor. 9 he lists strong arguments in favor of donor support for Christian workers. He writes approvingly that Peter and his wife still received church support after many years in missions.

Long before, Jesus had called Peter to leave his fishing business forever and trust God to provide through his people (Lk. 5:1-11). After Jesus' resurrection, Peter went back to his boats. Jesus met him on the beach and asked him to renew his commitment to fish only for people. He had to promise three times (John 21).

Years later he was still faithful to his commission. He still received financial support from God's people.

In 1 Cor. 9 Paul establishes his right as an apostle also to receive support from older churches and from his new ones. But then in the same chapter he says three times (verses 12, 15, 18) that he has never made use of this right! Three times! Since this letter is written from Ephesus near the end of his third journey it must cover all three journeys and probably the prior period.

Why does Paul reject church support for himself when he can have it? He approves of it, and logistics were no major problem since Peter received funds.

Clearly, Paul's reasons for working are more than financial. Twice he says he works in order to put no obstacle in the way of the Gospel. The other apostles worked in Jewish circles but Paul worked among Gentiles. If they identified him with the ubiquitous public orators, his message would be suspect. They spoke to please their audiences to reap fatter profits or to please their wealthy patrons to assure continued patronage.

Paul gains credibility for himself and his message by maintaining financial independence. He was not beholden to any faction in the church nor to any wealthy patron.

But two passages seem to contradict this conclusion. Paul did receive some gifts. So we must ask three questions: 1) How much did Paul work? 2) How much did he receive in donor gifts? 3) Why did he insist on working at all?

### **How much did Paul work?**

The first journey. 1 Cor. 9:6 suggests that Paul and Barnabas already supported themselves on their journey through Cyprus and Galatia.

Also, Paul's use of the present tense indicates both continued self-support when they formed separate teams.

The second journey. Paul plied his trade in Philippi (2 Cor. 11:12). He worked in Thessalonica according to both of his letters to these converts. He worked "night and day," that is, early morning and late afternoon shifts, the same work schedule observed in the Mediterranean today. Laborers go to work in the dark, take a three or four hour break during the heat of the day, and then work another shift that ends in the dark. Supper is eaten between nine and midnight.

In Corinth Paul's job-hunting resulted in working and lodging with Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:1-5) who were tentmakers by trade. Luke tells us that intellectual Paul was trained also to make and repair tents and other animal skin products.

Acts 18:5 is often said to mean that Paul worked only until Timothy and Silas arrived from Philippi with money. But the Greek says only that they found him already deeply involved in preaching. So it is often assumed that he had already quit the tentmaking job he had just found. Yet the text suggests no change in his activity after the arrival of his partners. There is no reason to believe he quit making tents. He integrated his ministry and his manual labor.

If Paul had quit tentmaking after a few days or weeks, it would never have become an issue in Corinth. Yet after Paul had moved on to Ephesus, Judaizers came to Corinth and tried to discredit Paul on this very issue. They claimed his manual labor proved he could not get support for his ministry because he was not a genuine apostle.

But if Paul had not worked most of the time in Corinth and elsewhere, the charges against him would have been unfounded and his passionate defense of his manual labor would have made no

sense. Because of this conflict we have Paul's valuable arguments for self-supporting missionary work in the two letters he wrote to his new church in Corinth.

The third journey. From Ephesus Paul wrote, "To this present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad, and buffeted and homeless, and labor, working with our hands" (1 Cor. 4:11, 12). The Judaizers said Paul's shabby clothes showed he was not important. Did Paul become an embarrassment to his upper-class converts?

In his farewell instructions to the Ephesian elders Paul says, "I coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities and to those with me. In all things I have shown you that by so toiling you must also help the weak." (Acts 20:3-35.)

Paul admonished the house church pastors to continue working for their own self-support, just as he had done, in order to model work and witness for the "weak"—for converts from unsavory backgrounds who could be easily tempted to continue a life of idleness, exploiting the generosity of other Christians (1 Cor. 6:10,11). When Paul quotes Jesus' words that "it is better to give than to receive," he does not mean the pastors should work to give to the poor.

Charity would foster the very irresponsibility and dependence Paul is trying to cure. Rather, the pastors' continued self-support was a costly kind of modeling that was needed in the pioneering stage of church planting in the immoral, idolatrous, indolent Gentile populace.

How then did Paul integrate his work and ministry? In addition to his on-the-job evangelism of individuals, Paul taught converts "from house to house." That is, he taught in the house churches, probably at night.

He also taught in the Hall of Tyrannus during the long midday break, from about 12 to 4, when this lecturer did not need the auditorium himself. (F.F. Bruce considers the early Western Text accurate in this detail.)

Luke records that Paul's listeners in the hall of Tyrannus borrowed his work apron and his handkerchief (the sweat rag around his brow) in hope of healing the sick. What a poignant glimpse of Paul teaching—in his work clothes! His lunch time audience of working people is probably dressed the same way (Acts 19:11,12).

Near the end of his third year in Ephesus Paul writes 1 Corinthians to answer the charges of the Judaizers. He then makes an emergency "painful visit" to Corinth, where he is rebuffed. He writes his "severe letter," which no longer exists. Then Demetrius' riot nearly costs Paul his life, but he flees to Troas. Then, too worried to wait there for Titus, he proceeds to Philippi, to intercept him there.

Titus brings good news. Paul writes 2 Corinthians. On his third visit he will work as before (11:12ff). That Paul insists on tentmaking even when his apostolic authority is in question, suggests it was a non-negotiable part of his pioneering strategy. But let's consider what looks like contrary evidence.

### **How much support did Paul receive?**

In 1 Cor. 9 he strongly defends his right (and that of other Christians) to donor support. He seems to contrast only support from his converts (which he rejects) and his own earnings. But his total defense includes support from any source.

In 2 Cor. 11:8, 9 he tells the Corinthians he even "robbed churches" to serve them. "Robbed" is clearly hyperbole—exaggeration for emphasis.

Even if the "brethren from Macedonia" had given huge gifts, it would not have been robbery. But the Philippians, like most Macedonians, were poor. Paul was shaming the Corinthians.

But besides 1 Cor. 9, the most crucial passage is Phil. 4:15, 16. Years later, the Philippians sent a gift to Paul when he was in Nero's palace prison where he could not work. Paul thanks them, and recalls their earlier help remarking that they were the only church that had ever given to his work! And they had given "once and again"—a vague term suggesting a time or two.

The Judaizers were demanding support from Paul's churches as their right. They were embarrassed that Paul took no contributions from his converts so they accused him of lying. They said he must be receiving contributions from some source on the sly.

Paul firmly denies this accusation in 2 Cor. 12:16-18, and insists he receives no funds from any source! In the pioneer stage he does not even accept free hospitality (2 Thess.3:6-16). He does accept food and lodging on brief visits to mature Christian friends in older, established churches—Philemon 22. (Traveling guests were expected to pay after a free night or two.)

The textual evidence seems to indicate that Paul and his team supported themselves on all three journeys as a matter of policy, and received no financial help from any source except for a couple of gifts from Macedonia. If Paul was receiving contributions from churches, his claims would be false and his arguments for self-support hypocritical.

### **Why does Paul work at all?**

In 1 Corinthians Paul defends both his message and his conversational preaching style which were under attack. He also answers the Corinthians' questions.

But in 9:3 he begins his formal defense on the most serious charge against his apostleship—his manual labor. Like most ancient writers (and most biblical writers) Paul puts the main issue in the center of his letter. He argues his defense in the middle of a section on giving up one's rights for the sake of the Gospel. Paul says, This is my defense to those who would examine me. @ We will consider three of Paul's reasons for his physical labor.

Credibility. He says twice (1 Cor. 9:12, 2 Cor. 6:3ff) that he works in order not to put an "obstacle" in the way of the Gospel so his message and motivation will not become suspect to the Gentiles. Paul's self-support demonstrates his genuineness. He receives no financial gain. Rather, it costs him dearly! He is not a "peddler of God's Word" or a "people-pleaser" who preaches what the audience wants to hear in order to gain fatter profits. He will not be identified with the unscrupulous orators who roamed the empire, exploiting their audiences. He does not take money from anyone so he can be "free from all men." He is not beholden to any wealthy patron or social clique, nor to any affluent person or faction in divisive Corinth. What a brilliant policy this proved to be in that city!

Identification. Paul works to adapt culturally to people in order to win them. He approaches the Jews as a Jew himself. He approaches Greeks (educated Gentiles) as a highly educated, trilingual, tricultural upper class Roman citizen. But he focuses primarily on the "weak," on the poor, less educated, lower classes and the barbarians. (These were not savages, but all whose first language was not Greek. This included rural or tribal people from the hinterlands, and many foreign captives. A few were day laborers, but most were slaves.)

Paul's social class and erudition gain him the respect of the upper class everywhere. (Apparently, not even his shabby clothing stands in the way.) In Athens he is quickly

invited by this university city's philosophers to speak in the Areopagus. In Ephesus even the Asiarchs (local Asian rulers) become his friends. The Roman procurator, Festus, said, Paul, your great learning is turning you mad. @

But it is harder for Paul to identify with the working classes, so he does manual labor to earn his own living (1 Cor. 9:19ff). He must dress and live as they do. But there is no pretense. He and his team are fully dependent on their own labor. (Does Phil.3:7-9 suggest Paul lost his inheritance?)

Why did educated Paul choose to identify with the artisans who were fairly low on the social and economic scale? Because most of the people in the Roman empire were near the bottom. Seventy to eighty percent were slaves! Moreover, the barbarians were his channel to the non-Greek speaking people groups in the rural and tribal hinterlands.

Paul's identification with the workers is not phony. Pay is poor. Often he is hungry, cold, ill-clothed. This incarnational model was not original with Paul. He imitates Jesus whose identification with us cost him everything. Paul reminds us of this in 2 Cor.8:9, Phil. 2:5-11, 1 Cor.11:1.

Modeling. Paul writes, "With toil and labor, we worked night and day that we might not burden any of you, and to give you an example to follow" (1 Thess. 3:8).

First, Paul shows converts how to live out the Gospel, not just in church, but in the marketplace! They had never seen a Christian. It was not enough to tell them how to live a holy life in their seductive, immoral, idolatrous culture. That Paul can live a godly life in this same filthy environment gives him credibility (1 Thess. 4:1ff).

Secondly, Paul models a biblical work ethic (2 Thess.3:6-15), transforming newly converted thieves, idlers and drunks into dependable providers for their

families and generous givers to the needy (1 Cor. 6:10, 11, Eph.4:28, 1 Tim.5:8). Imagine the impact of transformed bums on outsiders! Paul writes much about work, without which there can be no godly converts, healthy families, independent churches nor productive societies.

Thirdly, Paul sets an example that establishes a pattern for lay evangelism (1 Thess.1:5-8). Converts are immediately to be full-time, unpaid evangelists to their own social circles, answering questions about their transformed lives and new hope. Each convert was a new beachhead into enemy territory. They should not hastily alter their circumstances until they had won their extended families, friends, neighbors and their colleagues at work (1 Cor.7:17-24).

Paul did not evangelize haphazardly. He planned a careful strategy and laid solid foundations "like a skilled master builder" (1 Cor.3:10-15). Tentmaking was an essential part of his plan.

### **What was Paul's strategy?**

Paul's unique approach to church planting was designed to produce a great world-wide missionary lay movement—the quickest way to evangelize the whole world!

From the start Paul's churches were self-reproducing. Everyone evangelized, without pay. Lay evangelism was standard.

His churches were self-governing, not dependent on foreign leadership. Paul and his team members never pastored these churches, but appointed local house church leaders whom they coached and whom they taught the "whole counsel of God." Bible school!

His churches were self-supporting, never dependent on foreign funds. Even the house church pastors supported themselves during the pioneer stage.

But converts were taught to give, because care for the poor was not optional for Christians.

Paul appointed house church leaders almost immediately, but they kept their jobs (Acts 20:33-35). By the time the congregations required a full-time pastor, it was clear which local leader had the greatest respect among the house churches and among non-believers in the community (1 Tim.3:7). If the pastor had never worked and witnessed in the pagan workplace, how could he ask his members to do it? How could he train them? (Eph.4:11,12.)

By the time house churches multiplied and a full-time leader was needed, local funds were available for his support. Paul's older churches were to provide well for their pastors, as Paul reminded the Galatians, and later, the elders in Ephesus (Gal.6:6, 1 Tim.5: 17,18).

Members could give because they all worked. Paul had instilled a strong work ethic. They wanted to give because the pastor was not an outsider but a local leader they respected.

Most important, by then the basic pattern of unpaid evangelism was well established so that paid ministry was the exception rather than the rule.

Paul never allowed his churches at any stage to become dependent on foreign funds or on foreign leadership. Paul's strategy was not haphazard. Unless he supported himself he could not produce self-supporting evangelists or independent churches. He warns others to heed how they build on his carefully laid foundation. (1 Cor.3:10) Both doctrine and method mattered.

### **How effective was Paul's strategy?**

Many of his lay evangelists were from unsavory, uneducated, pagan backgrounds. None had anthropological or missiological training. Most were slaves.

Yet they had received the Gospel at great personal risk, and they risked their lives without pay to take it to others.

In ten years (the three journeys took a decade) Paul and his friends (without financial support) evangelized six Roman provinces!

They did it by winning and mobilizing the largely uneducated, unpaid converts, most of whom were slaves.

Paul writes to the Roman Christians about his past twenty years of missionary work, "From Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum (modern Albania) I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. . . I no longer have room for work in these regions" (Rom.15:19-24). He had evangelized the Greek-speaking half of the Empire and now turned to the Latin half, including Rome and Spain.

But how can he claim to have finished with the Greek half of the Mediterranean when he seems never to have worked outside the major cities? In the same letter Paul writes that he is debtor to Jew and Gentile, to Greeks and to barbarians (Rom.1:14-16). The barbarians were most of the people whose first language was not Greek, many of whom lived in the rural and tribal villages. Was Paul not concerned about them?

The Roman empire was never more than a chain of city colonies and military outposts, each with its own customs, local laws and deities, which were usually respected by the Roman authorities. Neither the Roman emperors, nor the Greeks before them, had ever tried to integrate or educate the tribal peoples. Many languages were spoken even in the cities. What trouble Paul experienced with the Lycaonian-speaking people in Lystra! (Acts 14.)

Paul's strategy met this challenge. By turning his multilingual, lower class converts into unpaid evangelists, Paul guaranteed the evangelization of the

hinterlands. Michael Green describes how converts ran to share the Gospel in their home towns. New converts took home the Gospel, clothed in their own language and culture, not as a foreign religion. Village people also made visits to the cities.

After a few months in Philippi, Paul speaks of Macedonian churches, in the plural. His first follow-up letter to the Thessalonians says the Gospel had sounded out from them throughout the whole region! Corinth spread the gospel through Achaia.

Paul stays in Ephesus three years, but Luke writes that after only two years "all Asia had already heard." (Acts 19:10) This was the whole Roman Province of Asia which had become the economic center of the empire because the great Asian trade routes passed through its cities!

Did Luke exaggerate? Demetrius, the silversmith, who started the riot, inadvertently confirms Luke's report! He says "Not only at Ephesus but almost throughout all Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable company of people. . ." So many that the silvercraft industry was almost out of business and the worship of Artemis was in danger of extinction! Acts 19:24-26. In about two years!

Paul's strategy brought indigenous, exponential growth! Converts multiplied. Speed matters when pioneering in antagonistic cultures. Paul's converts spread the gospel so quickly that by the time the opposition had geared up, it was too late to put out the fire! Today we give non-Christian religious leaders decades of time to mobilize their opposition to the Gospel.

Dr. Donald McGavran said that church growth requires a large force of unpaid evangelists. But how are they to be produced if the only models we provide are donor-supported? Missionaries from western countries are considered wealthy. Paul's converts could never say to him, "You do the evangelism because you get

paid for it and you have more time. You don't know what it is like to work long hours to support a family in our country."

The same problem does not occur when the tentmaker earns a good salary because he is not being paid for his Christian ministry. His salary may enable him to give generously where there is a need. We can moderate the Western pattern of paid ministry which we have exported around the world by sending self-supporting teams, each of which includes and provides for a regular missionary couple.

### **Can Paul's model help today?**

Examination of Paul's tentmaking clears up much of the confusion on this subject in mission circles today.

- 1) It supports a simple definition: Tentmakers are missions-motivated Christians who support themselves in secular positions, as they make Jesus Christ known on the job and in free time.
- 2) It demonstrates tentmaker ministry—its full-time character because of the integration of work and witness, and its focus on evangelism and house fellowships. The Christians' personal integrity, quality work, caring relationships and discreet verbal witness on the job, elicit questions about God from those who are seekers.
- 3) It provides a biblical basis for tentmaking, in balance with other missionary modes.
- 4) It adds a timeless, biblical rationale to our earlier list of current, practical reasons for tentmaking.
- 5) It provides a strategy for pioneer church planting among unreached peoples in hostile lands.
- 6) It provides a financial strategy for missions.

7) It provides a plan for personnel recruitment for the task.

8) It suggests the spiritual preparation needed and how to provide it.

9) It provides individuals and mission agencies criteria for tentmaking—when is it desirable?

10) It eliminates almost all the disadvantages—the same long list that concludes most tentmaking articles..

These "deficiencies" result from vague definitions, especially from the false assumption that all Christian expatriates are tentmakers, when probably only about one percent do any cross-cultural evangelism.

### **Are today's jobs viable for ministry?**

For 20 years Global Opportunities has researched hundreds of thousands of job openings in every kind of vocation, with about 40 kinds of employers, world-wide. GO provides job and missions counseling to help committed Christians to serve abroad as tentmakers. Here are a few answers to the most frequently asked questions. (See end notes for other GO Papers.)

Are job contracts long enough for language and culture learning? The initial contracts are usually for one to three years and can often be renewed. Even though the job can probably be done in English, tentmakers need to get to work on the language for their own cultural adjustment, to gain the confidence of the people and to sensitively share the Gospel. They are usually far more immersed in the language and culture than the regular missionary. Employers often provide language instruction for the family. Culture learning is faster when it is systematic rather than haphazard.

Are job contracts long enough for significant ministry? Tentmakers' jobs immediately subject them to the relentless scrutiny of non-believers and to their many questions. Witness begins at once. If they stay only two years, other tentmakers can continue working with their converts and contacts. (Tentmaker teams facilitate this.) But many tentmakers make life-time commitments to a region or a people group as long as God keeps providing new work contracts. Most long-term commitments are made during an initial short term.

Just a year or two abroad (even vacation service) prepares Christians to be better lay witnesses at home, to be members of their church missions committee, or to be more missions-committed as pastors or seminary professors.

Is pay adequate for the cost of living? International employers pay salaries that range from modest but adequate to very high with generous benefits. They pay round trip fares for the family, and sometimes private school education for the children. But the better jobs require good academic preparation and experience. Work permits are granted only to foreigners with expertise the country needs.

University teaching is one of the best contexts for tentmaking, but it often pays poorly because it is part-time. But many academic institutions pay well because they receive foreign grant money for this purpose. Contracts often stipulate that faculty persons may use half their time for additional earning through consulting.

Whatever the position, it should be acquired before leaving one's home country and ideally while one is still employed. Those who seek jobs after arrival abroad are often suspect. Why are they unemployed? Could they not get work at home? They are treated as local hires, and paid lower local wages, often without benefits and air fares. Usually they must leave the country where they

have applied, and wait with their families in an adjacent country until a work permit can be arranged. This can be costly.

The same problems do not occur if a still employed prospective tentmaker job hunts while on a round trip vacation in his target country. Personal interviews enhance the possibility of being hired. Otherwise, job hunting abroad should be a last resort.

Many Christians receive low pay abroad because they have raised full donor support and do not wish more than token employment. They hope that a few hours of English tutoring will qualify them for legal residence. But to use a job as a front or a cover for missionary work can make Christians suspect before their neighbors and colleagues. They view themselves as secret regular missionaries with jobs. They enter with a clandestine mentality which colors all they do, creating suspicions about themselves everywhere. They sacrifice credibility. Tentmaking is a unique approach to ministry in which the job is essential as the evangelism context. Many mission leaders have little appreciation for Paul's integrated work and witness because they have no experience in workplace evangelism.

### **Spiritual preparation needed?**

Not all soldiers need officer's training. But foot soldiers must know their Bibles, spiritual warfare, inductive Bible study, fishing evangelism and investigative (evangelistic) Bible study discussion leadership. They need at least a year of formal Bible, or its equivalent, acquired in a church or in a campus fellowship. They should take a short missions course like Perspectives. Evangelizing internationals is superb preparation.

Campus fellowships, like the IVCF-IFES, provide excellent in-service ministry training, because universities are microcosms of our multicultural, spiritually hostile world.

Young people can do summer missions training in other countries and gain experience with missionaries. Some do "Junior Year Abroad" language and culture study as they are trained in evangelism by experienced campus workers.

Tentmakers trust and obey

The main challenges in tentmaking are not deficiencies in cross-cultural lay ministry, but the restrictions of hostile governments. Regular missionaries would experience them too, except that they cannot gain access, unless they become tentmakers.

Tentmakers must evangelize discreetly, fishing out seekers, knowing that God can be trusted to protect them from danger, dismissal or expulsion. Not all is unpleasant. Many families enjoy life in these cultures, and live there for many years..

Our King owns all countries by right of creation and by right of purchase. He reigns! No one dare touch one his children unless he permits it.

Where only a few believers exist today, churches will soon flourish just as yesterday's persecuted minorities are today's multiplying churches. We have Jesus' word: "I will build my church!" (Mt.16.) We know how this cosmic war for control of the world turns out—we peeked at the end of the Book! (Rev.11:15, 7:9-12.)

But every evangelized region also becomes polarized, and a different kind of persecution arises, like the secularization of formerly Christian societies. Some mission leaders predict that soon missionaries will not be welcome anywhere. As we near the end of history, only local lay people and foreign tentmakers will be able to finish world evangelization. Now is the time to train lay people everywhere. The tentmaker model is crucial!

With many tentmakers in the expanding international job market of the 1990's and regular missionaries and host country believers and home country senders—all serving together under our Commander-in-Chief, we can plant the church in every people group and then join the great, multinational crowd to sing praises to the King of kings!

—Ruth E. Siemens

For Ruth's life story please read: "Ruth Siemens, the story behind GO"

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