

Miscellany 48: Why Should I Be a Missionary?

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Commentary on recent news, reading and events of personal interest.

Earlier this year I attended a church “retreat.” This is the second one in my life that I have attended. The first was about 1957, at the Presbyterian facility at Montreat, North Carolina. I have never liked the word “retreat.” I am much more disposed to moving forward. As the missionary David Livingstone once remarked that he was ready to ‘go anywhere provided it be forward.’ In any event, both events were very cordial. The company is congenial, and it is easy to think “good thoughts” in a peaceful, nonthreatening environment in the company of friends, without distractions.

The retreat was well organized. There were perhaps 50 people in all, and for one activity we divided at random into several smaller groups of about 10 people each, to discuss assigned topics. Before our group got started, members were passing time talking with one another. We were rather “spread out,” having taken seats in a large circle of chairs that had been arranged for a previous meeting. While waiting, I overheard the gentleman about four seats down from me state, “Why should I go on a mission? People ask me sometimes if I want to go on a mission, and I don’t see any reason why I should. Why should I?”

Since I was several seats away, not part of his conversation, and the structured discussion had not yet started, I did not attempt to inject myself into his conversation. At the time, I assumed that he might be posing a rhetorical question, and would answer it himself. In any event, the group discussion got under way, and I did not think further of his comment.

A few weeks later, I recalled the gentleman’s remark, and I passed it along (via e-mail) to one of our pastors, who was involved in mission activity. I thought that he might be able to use it as the basis for a sermon, or for a talk to prospective mission teams. The church I attend is old, large and wealthy, and it supports a number of mission activities. One of them is the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Santa Clara, Cuba. Last year my wife and I participated in a “mission trip” to the Santa Clara Church. A major activity of our church had been the construction of the first floor of an education / office building. As part of our trip, we examined this building and its uses, and participated in a number of activities of the Santa Clara Church. A mission trip to Cuba is an “easy” one, since the Cuban government does not allow any work to be done (e.g., construction or medical work) by foreign mission teams. All we could do was participate in church activities on a social level.

Upon receiving my e-mail, the pastor responded that preparing a talk on the man’s comments was an excellent idea, and that I should do it! I responded that his response was very good, and I would think about it, and over the next few weeks, I did.

Being an “analytical” and “research-oriented” personality, my first step was to find out some background on mission work. I am a rather “casual” member of the church, and of the Presbyterian religion, and have very little knowledge of this topic. So, my first step was to go to the local public library to find out something about missionaries and mission work. I looked for a book on David Livingstone, the best-known missionary of modern times. I was surprised that the library contained but a single book on Livingstone – a children’s book, *David Livingstone*:

Missionary and Explorer by Sam Wellman (206 pages, Barbour Publishing, 1995). I checked the book out and read it. Unfortunately, because of the intended age level of the book, it did not provide insight into why Livingstone did what he did. It simply described the events and activities of his life. While this alone was fascinating, it did not help me understand what motivated the man to do mission work, so I sought another source. On the Barnes and Noble website, I located a number of books on Livingstone, and ordered one: *David Livingstone*, by Meriel Buxton (Palgrave, 2001). This book was much better suited to my needs. It not only provided a description of Livingstone's life, but much commentary on his relationships with other people. This book was just 215 pages long, and so I could read it quickly. (It contains an index, notes, and a bibliography.) (There is a lot of material on the Internet about Livingstone, including some full-length books. See the Wikipedia article for a summary of his life.)

Buxton's biography of Livingstone, written over a hundred years since Livingstone's death, presents, in my view, a balanced description and commentary on the man. For many decades following Livingstone's death, Livingstone biographies were hagiographic – they painted the man as a saint, deliberately omitting or downplaying material that showed him otherwise. There is no doubt that Livingstone was an exceptionally courageous and ambitious man. He was a great explorer. Because of his explorations, Africa was "opened up" to later European exploration and colonization. Shortly after his death, in tribute to the man, Britain outlawed slave trading. (The movement to ban slavery and the slave trade had been ongoing for quite some time, and the practice was banned essentially because it was no longer economically profitable, not because it was morally castigated. Nevertheless, Britain had not formally outlawed trafficking in slaves, and it is a measure of the country's profound respect and admiration of Livingstone that it formally did so right after his death.)

Here follows a brief chronology of Livingstone's life (adapted from Buxton).

- 1813 Born 19 March in Blantyre, Scotland.
- 1823 Started work in a cotton mill (14 hours per day (6 am – 8 pm), six days per week, for 13 years).
- 1826 Studied Latin during and after work.
- 1833 Slavery abolished in the British Empire
- 1834 Read pamphlet on medical missionaries in China; decides to become a medical missionary.
- 1836 Enrolls in Anderson's College, Glasgow.
- 1838-39 Probationer of London Missionary Society (LMS) at Chipping Ongar. Courted a young lady and is rejected as a suitor. Generally not attractive to women. Heard Robert Moffat speak on missionary work.
- 1840 Qualified in medicine, ordained as minister. Heard Thomas Buxton speak on the slave trade. Accepted Buxton's view that Christianity and commerce (trade) would bring an end to the slave trade (which still flourishes, although abolished in the British Empire in 1833). Sailed to Africa (as an LMS missionary), arrives at Robert Moffat's Kuruman mission (on the Kuruman River, in what is now northern South Africa) in July, 1841.
- 1841-43 Traveled in southern Africa (what is now northern South Africa and southern Botswana; based in Robert Moffat's Kuruman mission; founded mission at Mabotswa, 220 miles from Kuruman and near present-day Mafeking (near the Malopo River, which divides present-day Botswana and South Africa)).
- 1844 Engaged to Mary Moffat, Robert Moffat's eldest daughter.
- 1845 Married Mary Moffat, moved to Chonuane (40 km north of Mabotswa) because of drought.
- 1846 Son Robert born.

1847 Moved to Kolobeng (just west of present-day Gaborone, Botswana, on the Kolobeng River) because of drought; daughter Agnes born.

1848 Converted chief Sechele to Christianity (his only convert, who later lapsed).

1849 Son Thomas born. Expedition to Lake Ngami (in northwest Botswana, south of the Okavanga Delta) with William Cotton Oswell.

1850 Expedition with Mary and children; Daughter Elizabeth born and died; Mary had stroke.

1851 Son Oswell (Zouga) born.

1852 Visited Cape Town, South Africa. Mary and children sent to England (for children's education). Kuruman and Kolobeng missions sacked by Boers.

1853 Conducted explorations in southern Africa; started for west coast.

1854 Reached Luanda (in what is now Angola) on the Atlantic coast.

1855 Visited Mosi-oa-Tunya ("Smoke that Thunders") Falls, renamed them as Victoria Falls.

1856 Traveled to Quilimane (in what is now Mozambique) on the Indian Ocean, becoming the first European to traverse southern Africa.

1856 Sailed to England.

1857 Published *Missionary Researches and Travels in South Africa*. Acquired fame and fortune.

1858 David, Mary and Zouga (not yet in school) travelled to Cape Town, South Africa. Began Zambezi expedition. David sailed for the Zambezi and Mary travelled to Kuruman. Daughter Anna Mary born at Kuruman.

1859-61 Explored Shire River, Lake Shirwa, Lake Nyasa.

1862 Mary arrived at mouth of Zambezi River, died four months later of malaria (six-day illness).

1863 Explored Lake Nyasa.

1864 Sailed Lady Nyassa to Bombay, India. Sailed to England. Son Robert died in US Civil War.

1865 Published *Zambezi* book.

1866-1873 Conducted explorations in southeastern Africa (Mozambique, Malawi, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia). Died on 1 May 1873 at age 60 near Lake Bangweulu, Zambia, of dysentery, hemorrhoids and malaria.

1871 Journalist Henry Stanley located Livingstone at Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika; they explored for a year.

1874 State funeral conducted in Westminster Abbey.

Livingstone's Accomplishments

The following summary, from Linda Pfothenhauer's *Botswana: Africa's Last Wilderness, The Complete Guide* (Longman Botswana, 1994) of Livingstone's work in what is now Botswana reflects well his interests and accomplishments. Note that this summary addresses only his explorations in Botswana.

Livingstone in Bechuanaland [name of Botswana before independence in 1966]

Africa's grand and bold explorer, David Livingstone (1813 to 1893) epitomized the spirit of the nineteenth-century western world; exploration, adventure, enquiry, discovery and expansion.

Although Livingstone came to Africa in 1840 as a missionary doctor, his interests and energy were channelled increasingly into exploration, the pursuit of knowledge, and, in his later years, the abolition of the slave trade. Throughout his 40 years of travel through Africa, Livingstone

covered approximately 30 000 miles, charted over a million miles of African territory, traced the course of the Zambezi River, mapped the Central African river system, and mounted expeditions which led to his becoming the first white man to see Victoria Falls, Lake Ngami, Lake Nyasa and the Shire Highlands.

A man of extraordinary determination, tenacity and patience, he endured incredible hardship to achieve his goals. He died in Nyasaland (at Banguelu), whilst exploring that region, disappointed that he had neither crushed the slave trade, nor established the mission station he had dreamt of for so long.

The full impact of Livingstone's work was, however, to be seen after his death. His geographical discoveries and natural history, ethnographic, anthropological and even astronomical observations contributed to tremendous advances in the western world's knowledge of the unknown, uncharted African continent. His reports to England about the slave trade made inroads on the social conscience of Europe and contributed to the eventual abolition of slavery. The public sentiment which he aroused eventually brought a widespread Christian movement over much of the continent.

Livingstone's contact with and impact upon the Batswana [the people of Botswana] were considerable. During his early years in southern Africa (1840 to 1852), he set before himself the task of establishing a mission station in Bechuanaland.

Arriving at Kuruman Mission Station (headed by Robert Moffat, whose daughter, Mary, Livingstone later married), Livingstone soon set out – with two oxcart-drivers and converts – and travelled for about 1,000 miles. He camped amongst the Bakwena, cutting himself off from all contact with Europeans, learning their language, culture and customs.

In 1843 he camped at the Bakwena Paramount Chief Sechele's village and befriended him. Sechele told Livingstone of the 'great thirstland' beyond – the Kalahari – and a lake in the northern reaches of Tswana territories – Lake Ngami.

During their years in Bechuanaland, Livingstone and his wife, Mary, built houses at Mabotsa, Chonuane, and later at Kolobeng. It was during their time at Kolobeng that Livingstone's friendship with Chief Sechele deepened and the chief eventually converted to Christianity.

Stories of the Kalahari and Lake Ngami eventually enticed Livingstone to mount his first major expedition. He and his travelling companions, W Oswell and M Murray, accompanied by a group of Hottentots and Bakwena, reached the lake on 7 August 1849. They were the first white men to see the lake. It was here that Livingstone was told of the well-watered, fertile lands to the north. It had been his ambition to find a healthy site for a mission station out of reach of the Boers – who were steadily encroaching on Tswana lands and occupying areas of the Transvaal – and this news led to further expeditions to northern territories.

His next expedition, with his wife, four children, and Oswell, took him to the Makololo Chief Sebituane, on an island in the Chobe River, and on later journeys to the Linyanti area. Then, fearing for the health and safety of his family who had already suffered considerably from hunger, thirst and illness, he accompanied them to Cape Town, and saw them off to England.

Another journey north brought him again to the Linyanti region and the Makololo. More determined than ever to 'open a path to the interior, or perish', he left Linyanti in 1853, ending

the first stage of his career – 12 years in southern Africa, much of which had been spent in Bechuanaland.

[End of Pfothenauer excerpt.]

Livingstone's Concept of Missionary Work

While Livingstone was sincere in his religious beliefs and in his missionary work, he was far more interested in exploring than in proselytizing. When the LMS offered to send him to the West Indies, he strongly rejected the notion, writing to them that a half-trained doctor would be of little use in an area already served by many qualified and experienced doctors, and working there would be too much like ministry at home. He was not interested in working in a region that was limited or already familiar. What he sought was epitomized in the words of Robert Moffat, which he heard a few months later, "The smoke of a thousand villages where no missionary had ever been."

He accepted the view of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton of the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and for the Civilization of Africa (who had assumed leadership of the anti-slavery movement after the death of William Wilberforce) that the best way to destroy the slave trade was to open Africa to trading in other commodities that could be produced there. Buxton promoted the "three great C's": Christianity, Commerce and Civilization.

Livingstone was greatly moved by Moffat and Buxton, and he devoted the rest of his life to implementing Buxton's approach in Africa. He had little use for missionary activities that focused on establishing a small permanent mission near a few villages, opting instead for a vision of using Christianity, Commerce and Civilization to change all of Africa. He was not interested in saving a few souls, and he did not enjoy remaining in one place for very long. In the context of his vision, the hardships and deaths of others he dragged along or inspired to accompany or follow him were not a consideration. He enjoyed missionary work on his terms, which evidently consisted of 99 percent exploring and one percent proselytizing.

When he saw that after 23 years, Moffat's mission at Kuruman had converted only about 40 black Africans to Christianity, he decided that individual conversion was an inefficient and ineffective means of spreading Christianity, and for the rest of his life he supported the concept of setting a good example and development of commerce as the primary means of promoting the faith. He was bold in his actions. Because of the delays in communicating with London from Africa, he did not wait for permission to take action, such as his explorations. He was fearless, facing death from wild animals and hostile savages many times.

Concerning Livingstone's approach to missionary work, Buxton writes the following: "Livingstone's approach to his missionary duties was becoming more realistic. Perhaps drawing a different conclusion from the case of Sechele [Livingstone's sole convert] from that which other missionaries of the time, including Moffat, would have drawn, he no longer saw success in terms of conversions of a handful of souls, each individual's spiritual development being the subject of detailed analysis over a period of years. He wrote to his father: 'The conversion of a few, however valuable their souls may be, cannot be put into the scale against the knowledge of the truth spread over the whole country,' and in his journal he made a similar comment, drew an analogy with missionary successes in India and concluded: 'The general knowledge is the criterion ... Where missionaries in the midst of masses of heathenism seem like voices crying in the wilderness ... future missionaries will see conversions following every sermon. We prepare the way for them.' Perhaps his preaching was more successful than even he believed: a

missionary visiting that country nearly thirty years later found old men there who could still remember Livingstone's sermons in detail.”

Livingstone's Shortcomings

Livingstone was a somewhat complex individual. He was famously successful in some areas, such as exploring, and a failure in other areas, such as a preacher, a family man, a husband and a father. He was incredibly hard-working. As a boy and young man, he worked 14 hours a day, six days a week, in a cotton mill, for 13 years. He studied at the end of each day. He was very persistent and determined. Because of his poor preaching ability (uninspiring and difficult to understand because of an oversized uvula), the London Missionary Society first refused to approve him as a missionary, but, in view of his other good traits and severely disadvantaged background, reconsidered.

In his entire life as a missionary, he converted but a single African to Christianity, and that person lapsed (when unwilling to restrict himself to but a single wife). He was a good leader of black Africans, but a very poor leader of white men. He did not suffer fools at all, and hardly suffered anyone else whom he did not consider his equal or who was not a recognized expert in some field in which Livingstone did not excel. He minimized the dangers of life in Africa, and thereby led two mission teams to disaster, including many deaths.

While he cared deeply for his family, they counted for little in his important life decisions. Early in his marriage he was absent for many months, exploring. He dragged his wife and three small children on a brutal expedition in 1850, during which Mary had another child, which died after a month. He moved his family from one location to another, despite the strong protests of his mother-in-law and others.

The following paragraph from Meriel Buxton's book describes Livingstone well. “Probably she wanted them both to remain at Kolobeng or some similar base for the rest of their lives, like her parents. But Livingstone was not as other missionaries were. His drive and determination had set him apart from other men all his life. Men of destiny have rarely made good family men, nor even easy companions. He was sufficiently a man of his own time and culture to need to justify to himself any deviation from the traditional approach. Even at the end of his life, when the issues of wife and family have long ceased to apply, his conscience would not allow him to regard exploration for its own sake as a worthwhile pursuit. But at this time he had persuaded himself, and perhaps even persuaded Mary as well, that God was calling him to follow the path on which he had set his heart. ‘It is a venture to take wife & children into a country where fever, African fever, prevails. But who that believes in Jesus would refuse to make a venture for such a Captain?’ he declared. ‘I am happy to say that Mary reciprocates these sentiments.’”

Buxton continues: “When his children asked him ‘When shall we return to Kolobeng? When to Kuruman?’, the only homes they had ever known, he consoled them with the reply ‘Never. The mark of Cain is on your foreheads. Your father is a missionary.’”

When the children were approaching school age, in 1852, he sent them all to England for education. During this time they were without financial resources, and suffered extreme penury. Mary had no income, was forced to beg for handouts, and became an alcoholic. While Mary and the children suffered for lack of funds, David spent his own meager salary on his Africa activities. David spent the next four years flitting about the south African continent doing his exploring, while his family endured terrible hardships. He rejoined them after four years, in 1856, in England, at which time he devoted himself to writing his first book. He achieved fame

and fortune. He returned with Mary to Africa in 1858, sent Mary to her mother's home at Kuruman (despite Mary's assertion that she could not live as both a mother and a child), and started off on further adventures. Mary had another child later that year. Once more he was separated from Mary, this time also for four years. In 1862 Mary travelled to meet David at the mouth of the Zambezi River. She contracted malaria and died after four months.

Livingstone returned to England in 1864 and, in 1865, published another book on his explorations. He returned to Africa in 1866, and continued exploring until his death in 1873.

His letters to his children and wife were usually cold and stern. He preached and admonished, rather than consoled them for their long absence and hardships caused by his lack of financial support. He provided neither financial nor emotional support for them during their first four-year absence from him in England. Here follows (from Buxton) an excerpt from one of his letters to Mary during this time: "I am thankful that you are where you are, and if you improve your opportunities you may have cause for gratitude through life. Hope you give much of your time to your children. You will be sorry for it if you don't."

Buxton writes: "The main victim of his lack of care was Robert, though the others suffered, too, both mentally and physically. Tom's constant ill health and early death have been blamed on his African childhood, though it is more likely that the problem started in Britain. Yet had Livingstone sent them away from him earlier Mary's life would have been even more wretched. The way of life Livingstone chose for himself was not suitable for a wife and children."

In 1855, the LMS criticized that Livingstone's exploration activities were only remotely connected with the spread of the Gospel. Livingstone saw no contradiction in his work, viewing the exploration had to precede the spread of the Gospel. As soon as he was financially independent (owing to his successful book, *Missionary Travels*), he and the LMS severed ties. From that point on, his explorations were funded by the British government or from his own funds. It may be that Livingstone felt some unease at the way that he abandoned his missionary work for exploring, but the LMS benefited much financially from his fame.

Buxton writes: "Tim Jeal [a biographer] maintains that the way in which Livingstone handled his employment negotiations at this time are revealing about his character: 'Duplicity and ruthlessness are by no means uncommon in exceptional men, but when they occur in the personality of a man usually considered to have been honest to a fault and gentle in his dealings, it does call for remark.'"

Livingstone was an optimist, and undertook tasks against seemingly impossible odds, accomplishing his goals through determination, hard work and persistence. He worked better alone than with a team. He was an idealist. He believed that colonization of Africa would benefit both the British Empire and Africa. Buxton writes: "...his ideal was to allow each country to benefit from what the other had to offer. Africa had space, raw materials, untouched country. Britain could offer technical and commercial expertise, democratic institutions, education, leadership and, above all, Christianity. He longed to give each the best of both worlds, and, with his curious ability for turning a blind eye to aspects he did not wish to see, conveniently ignored the inevitable conclusion that the worst of each culture would be quite as certain to surface."

Livingstone has been accused of responsibility for the failure of the Helmore missionary group sent out by the LMS. The group consisted of Holloway Helmore, his wife and four of their children, Roger Price, his wife and child. None had medical training. Eventually all but Price

and two of the Helmore children died. Livingstone did not wish to be part of the mission team, but insisted that it be sent out. He did not brief the team on aspects of the trip that were important for their survival. Although the group had no medical skills, Livingstone did not share with them any of the knowledge that he had acquired about treating malaria (with quinine). Buxton writes: "He claimed that his treatment was not scientifically proven and it would have been unethical to publish it, but made no attempt to pass this information on to the group in an informal way. No one had asked for his help or advice, he said. While they were all aware of the importance of involving the Moffat family, the missionaries, fresh from England, had no guidance on the right way to establish good relations with tribal chiefs."

Despite professing love for his children, Livingstone treated them shabbily. Buxton writes of Livingstone's son, Robert's death (after Robert had gone to America and ended up fighting in the Civil War):

Livingstone, before he learned what had actually happened, was worried. He wrote to James Young 'I cannot free myself from blame in his having so little of fatherly care. I am very heartsore about him.'

It was almost a year before he learned more. In July 1864 he wrote to Kirk with chillingly brutal prescience: 'My heart is rather sore – that bad boy has got into the American Army and will be made manure of, for those bloody fields.'

In October he received a final, heart-breaking letter from the boy himself. Robert explained how he came to be taking part in the American Civil War, telling of his part in one battle and two skirmishes, of how he fired high to avoid killing anyone and controlled his passion sufficiently to take his opponent prisoner despite the 'furious madness' of a bayonet charge. He spoke of his craving for travel, of throwing away his chance of an education and of his use of the pseudonym Rupert Vincent to avoid bringing further dishonour on his father's name, he of whom his father had recently written that his sole interest was to make capital out of having a famous father.' He started this letter 'My dear Sir, Hearing that you have returned to England I undertake to address a few lines to you, not with any hope that you will be interested in me but simply to explain the position,' and concluded it, 'Your quondam son, Robert.'

His father strove to pull strings to have him sent home but to no avail. Robert was captured soon after in another skirmish and died in a Confederate prisoner of war camp on 5 December 1864 aged 18.

While his father had no official confirmation of this until Stanley reached him in Africa in 1871, he was under no illusions. He commented many times that they would never hear of him again in this world, saying, 'I am proud of the boy. If I had been there I should have gone to fight for the North myself.'

For Robert had died in his father's cause, fighting against slavery. Livingstone's shock and grief at the assassination of Abraham Lincoln the following April must have been exacerbated by recollections of Robert.

The long months of uncertainty probably affected Agnes more than her father. Brother and sister had been very close, and with the optimism of youth she continued to hope long after her father had accepted the inevitability of Robert's fate.

[End of excerpt.]

Other Aspects of Character

Livingstone was open-minded for his time. He was attracted to the London Missionary Society because it sent forth Protestant missionaries of any denomination (he was a member of the Scottish Congregational Church). He viewed that it would be preferable for Africans to be converted to any denomination of Christianity – even Catholicism – rather than remain pagan (although this could be considered to be cultural arrogance and narrow-mindedness, rather than open-mindedness).

Livingstone exposed his wife and children to harsh living conditions, and was blind to leading other missionaries to their deaths. He appears to have been totally thoughtless and inconsiderate of the needs of others, concerned only with his own goals. He was tactless and unsympathetic, insensitive but quick to take offence. He expected other Europeans to meet his very high standards of endurance, and made no allowance for their weaknesses. With Africans, he was patient, understanding, appreciative, supportive and encouraging.

In his last years, Livingstone did not forgive or forget. He dwelled on old grievances and wrote of them in letters to his friends.

Despite his inflexibility in dealing with others, Livingstone was a practical man who allowed practicality to take precedence over principles in order to advance his personal interests. In order to advance his explorations, he was willing, particularly late in life, to deal socially with Arab and Portuguese slave traders, even though he abhorred slave trading and worked for its destruction.

Consideration of Success and Failure

Over the years, biographies about Livingstone have changed perspective. On this topic, Buxton writes:

A century after Livingstone's death the tendency to hagiography was reversed. Tim Jeal's biography opened with the declaration that Livingstone "appears to have failed in all he most wished to achieve. He failed as a conventional missionary, making but one convert, who subsequently lapsed. He failed as the promoter of other men's missionary efforts (the two missions that went to Africa at his behest ended in fiasco and heavy loss of life). . . . failure as a husband and a father, failure to persuade the British government to advance into Africa."

Jeal concludes too that the Portuguese had probably reached most of the places he is alleged to have discovered before him and that the Zambesi expedition was disastrous.

While Jeal's final chapter gives a more balanced assessment of his achievements and the long-term consequences for Africa of his thinking, the overall impression of his book is that of failure as conveyed in the opening pages. Livingstone's alleged failure as a missionary is emphasized the more by the chapter heading 'The Only Convert'. Even Seaver, whose much more sympathetic account was published in 1957, 16 years before Jeal's, concludes that at the time of his death 'it must have seemed that all he had striven for had been failure', as a husband, a father, a missionary, a geographer and a liberator. 'It is true,' Seaver adds, 'that he accomplished far more by his death than by his life.'

Jeal's catalogue of failures does make one important modification. Livingstone did indeed fail as a conventional missionary. He decided early in his career that the conventional approach was certainly not for him and perhaps was not the right way forward at all. Conventional missionaries established themselves in a small native community and remained there sometimes for the rest of their lives, establishing a church and preaching Christianity. Converts were supposed only to be admitted to the Church when they had an understanding and acceptance of the basic tenets of Christianity and were living what the missionaries would accept as a Christian life. In some ways much more was asked of a convert than of a parishioner in an English village, even without taking into account the different moral principles on which each had been reared. Livingstone had a deeper sympathy than any of the other missionaries with the Africans for whom embracing Christianity meant abandoning much which they had been brought up to believe was right. Sechele, for example, was seriously worried, and with reason, that if he put away any of the wives whom he had married quite legitimately within the terms of his own culture, considerable suffering would be caused to the wife thus rejected. Yet, when he returned to one of his former wives, he was regarded as a lapsed convert, branding both himself and Livingstone who had converted him with failure. Sechele in fact lived his final years in full church membership: his 'lapse' was only temporary. Livingstone accepted that this was the rule for 'counting' conversions, but he had reservations concerning the system, which would be shared by many modern Christians. Other principles of Victorian Christianity conflicted with correct behaviour within the social structure of an African tribe. Much which appeared sinful to the missionaries was seen in an altogether different light by the tribesmen. Even ways of expressing themselves which were merely figurative to the Africans and well understood between them could be interpreted as dishonest by the Europeans. Ownership of land and possessions was understood quite differently, again leading to moral confusion.

Livingstone, in common with most Englishmen at the time, had not appreciated before he reached Africa what a minute number of converts was actually made by the missionaries. Any missionary who could legitimately claim that his converts in a lifetime ran into double figures was outstandingly successful.

The relationship between missionaries and Africans was one of constant bargaining. The Africans in general wanted the powers the missionaries could give them without the discipline the missionaries sought to impose. They were particularly interested in 'gun magic' and the technical skills which the missionaries brought, and in the diplomatic advantages to be obtained in their dealings with other tribes or with the Boers.

[End of excerpt.]

Answer to My Friend's Question

The reason for presenting the preceding material on Livingstone was to help facilitate an answer to my friend's question, "Why should I go on a mission?" It would appear that although David Livingstone failed as a traditional missionary, his life's work captured the imagination of other people, leading to the Christianization and economic exploitation of Africa following his death. It should also be noted that the economic development of Africa led to the complete destruction of pre-European African culture, and massive destruction of the environment (mass species extinction).

Had Livingstone operated as a "traditional" missionary, he would have been fortunate to match the performance of his father-in-law, Robert Moffat, who was highly regarded as a missionary. Following this path, he would have lived in one place and converted perhaps 20 Africans to

Christianity in his lifetime. In this case, nothing would have really changed with respect to the opening-up of Africa, until some other explorer or explorers conducted the explorations that he did. Should he have accepted traditional family responsibilities and remained at one mission station in Africa, or returned with his family to England when they were ready for schooling? If he had, then he would have foregone his life of exploration and discovery. Africa would still have been developed because, like the abolition of slavery, that was an idea whose time had come. Nothing would have changed in the world's progress, but he would have perhaps been a better husband and father – but maybe not, since leading a life he couldn't stand could have caused far worse suffering to his family than what they endured when he followed his heart. He would not have achieved fame and fortune, and his family would have not experienced a comfortable life in their later years.

Should Livingstone have been a traditional missionary, denied his desires, and accomplished very little, or should he have followed his heart, as he did, causing much suffering for his family but leading to fame and fortune and massive change in Africa (Christianization, economic exploitation, cultural destruction, environmental destruction)? In my view, the lesson from Livingstone's life is to follow your heart. As suggested by Napoleon Hill (*Think and Grow Rich*) and Bertrand Russell ("The Good Life"), consider your desires (through reflection, meditation and prayer); obtain relevant knowledge, discuss alternatives with others; make plans and preparations; believe in your ability to achieve your goal; and take action. If you view that all is the will of God, and accept that God works in mysterious ways, it was perhaps His "plan" or "desire" for Livingstone to fail as a traditional missionary and subject his wife and family to considerable suffering, in order to set the stage – as Livingstone himself believed – for Christendom to achieve the Christianization – and, after just 150 years, the total devastation – of Africa following his death.

So my advice – unsolicited and undelivered – to my questioning friend is: Follow your heart. Go on a mission trip if, after considering this action, you desire to do it. No one can answer this question for you, but you.