

Dear interested friend,

It's nice to know that you share our passion for what we believe to be God's heartbeat—MISSIONS. We're always excited to see God's continuing work in the lives of His people. I'd like to take this opportunity to allow you to know more about us, as well as to encourage you in your interest in missionary service.

I'm from upstate New York. Karen is from Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean. My wife knew from an early age that she would be a missionary. I've always said from an early age that I'd be willing to be a missionary but never felt certain that I should be. Thank God that He constantly uses a variety of ways of drawing different people from different backgrounds with different personalities into the same work of proclaiming the gospel to everyone, everywhere.

When talking to people that are interested in missions, a common statement comes up that in effect says, "I'd like to be a missionary, but the funds or the process seems to be insurmountable."

Karen comes from a poor family in a poor country. If she was going to be an overseas missionary God was going to have to make it happen. Can you imagine coming to the U.S. going through Bible college and then on through graduate school when the average income at home the year she came was \$4361.18 per year (UC Atlas of Global Inequality, <http://ucatlas.ucsc.edu/income.php>). Karen knew what God was calling her to do and she took the necessary steps to allow Him to do it. Karen finished up both her undergrad and graduate work without any debt. She says, "Money just came in. Some money was sent from Trinidad, some was sent anonymously. I received funds through scholarships. God provided me the opportunity to work as a Resident Advisor during school which in turn gave me free room and board." The year after we got married the seminary we were attending allowed for spouses of full time students to go to school for free. They did that for only one semester and as far as we are concerned God did that for us. If God has a plan for you He will make sure that it happens when you step into the path he is making for you (Romans 8:28-29).

I've also heard others say concerning a possible missionary calling, in effect, "I'm not sure whether God's calling me or not. I have a desire, but I don't think I've experienced a call."

My preparation for going overseas has been quite different from Karen's experience. I made a commitment at an Alliance camp when I was a kid, but was never confident of a "calling." I had a passion for overseas ministries. I had a desire to be a missionary. But I never felt comfortable saying, "I've been called to be a missionary." I was looking for a supernatural experience before saying "I've

been called to be a missionary.” But that experience for me never came, it did for others around me, but not for me. In light of my uncertainty as a young adult I spent several years pursuing other things that weren’t ministry focused. I was a retail manager for Macy’s for several years. I was a graphic artist for a newspaper and then a magazine for several more years. But I was never fully satisfied with any of that. I loved the work, but I was hoping there was something better out there for me. In time I signed up for seminary. I chose a seminary that had a strong missions department because I wanted to keep my options open. My plan was to get a degree so that I could be a pastor in the states. However, God began working in my heart as I left the door open (Proverbs 19:21). That desire and passion for missions that was there as a kid was still there and it began to get fed. It grew to the point that I could not see myself doing anything else but missions. This didn’t happen because I had a particular supernatural experience with God that enabled me to say with confidence, “I’ve been called.” It happened because I allowed God to work with the desires He instilled in my life and He cultivated them until they were full bloom (Ezekiel 36:26; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

I know that some future missionaries, like my wife, know with certainty they will be missionaries. I also know that some future missionaries aren’t sure whether they are really supposed to be missionaries. Either way, my encouragement to you is to give God every opportunity to work out His plans for your life. If you know that your going to be a missionary press forward toward that goal. Don’t allow circumstances to discourage what God can and will do in and for you. If you are uncertain about your calling, feed the passion and desire that is there and see if God continues to cultivate them into the undeniable evidence that you need.

My wife and I would like to continue to interact with you in your development if you want that. We ask that you send us an e-mail and tell us of your desire to correspond.

May God richly bless you life.

In sub-mission,

J and Karen Spurling

Missionaries with the Christian and Missionary Alliance

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