

INVOLVEMENT OF CHRISTIAN PROFESSIONALS IN MISSIONS IN NIGERIA:

A STUDY TO INVESTIGATE WHY CHRISTIAN PROFESSIONALS ARE NOT ACTIVELY
INVOLVED IN MISSIONS.

A CASE STUDY OF THE NIGERIA CHRISTIAN GRADUATE FELLOWSHIP

BY

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1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Some years ago, I was seconded to labor along with a sister-ministry among the Shuwa Arabs in Nigeria. When we arrived at the place, we were given orientation; and part of it was that we will not really be accepted by the people without a job per se. Therefore, joining the team meant getting a work to do. Thankfully the team had a private medical center and I became a member of the staff of the center. Although I read Chemistry Education, I was given some minor training and I had to work in the laboratory of the clinic. It was an opportunity to meet the villagers and to make me relevant in the community.

This experience opened my heart to the great need for professionals in mission; and the impact that they can make in communities and tribes. We also had members of our team who were traders, seamstresses, etc. Whenever I went to the market, my friends regarded me as a doctor, but whenever they made their complaints I had to invite them to the clinic or I referred them to the doctors and nurses. I realized that with this great need, a teacher did not have to convert to a laboratory scientist if we had laboratory scientists in the team. The enormous need for professionals became more obvious to me. I have also observed keenly that many Christian professionals are good Sunday worshipers and many have resigned from their jobs to become full-time church workers. But the challenge is that CHRISTIAN PROFESSIONALS have more opportunities in the market place in terms of making impact. Until professionals therefore see the market place as a ministry point, they may be waiting to become pastors, evangelists or missionaries before they begin to do ministry.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Few Christian professionals are seeing their professions as a missionary tool rather than for money making. Whereas Christian professionals are supposed to use their offices, skills and opportunities to both defend the gospel and serve humanity; it ends up in money gathering. Christian professionals then give a lot of money gotten even if through corruption to missionaries to do the job and this is my bother. Are missionaries some group of people in the villages only? Also whereas all professions are to be useful tools for missions, only a few – medical, teaching, are really being used in some quarters but lawyers, engineers, bankers, etc, are not being explored.

John Stott however has noted this in his book *Issues facing Christians today*:

Lay people need to know that their daily work is important to God. Indeed, it is essential to furthering God's purposes for the world. They are not in a waiting room desired for those who are doing "Christian work", nor are they in some second league because they do not preach every weekend. What they do they are called to do "as unto the Lord", because it is service for Him.

Robert Fraser in his book *Market Place Christianity* also pointed out that ***'Because it is really the Lord we are serving in our tasks then it is impossible for us to be other than completely whole hearted'***. We have noted that there are a few other Christian groups involved in mobilizing professionals, such as, the Full Gospel Businessmen Fellowship International, who majorly meet in Hotels and try to reach out to people of the high class that scarcely to go to church.

The Nigeria Christian Graduate Fellowship believes that Christian professionals should not forget Christ after their study in the university; and so the need to continue to encourage them to stand for Christ and reach out to their fellow professionals. Christian Lawyers Fellowship of Nigeria (CLASFON) also exists to see that lawyers are mobilized to serve Christ with their profession such

that they can take up even cases of the poor and the needy. The Nigeria Christian Medical and Dental Association also tries to organized regular conferences to encourage its members to serve God with their profession; and to remind them of the ethical issues within the profession. The Institute of Medical Missions (IMM) trains medics on how best to use their profession for missions. The Association of Christian Schools in Nigeria (ACSN), which started a few years ago, addresses the fact that Christian schools should maintain the standard of Christian ethics as well as put Christ in the Centre of their services; fight to see education as a tool for missions; and there are many other groups across the country. A few persons in Nigeria have come together to form a forum known as Business as Mission (BAM) Nigeria, although not much has been done yet. Business as Mission is one way that business is started not just for money but for the purposes of mission extension. There are also several other initiatives like Tent Making International, Africa Kingdom Business Forum(AKBF) of Intercessor for Nigeria, Institute of National Transformation, etc.

Some sensitization is also going on, by Kingdom Project, Eternity Ministries, Peace House, Africa Professionals Resource Mission (ApRM Centre) and many others I may not have met yet. A few professionals are responding to the missionary thrust in terms of active participation. This research therefore seeks to find out why very few Christian professionals do not see their professions as missionary tools rather than for money making. It will as well endeavor to find out how Christian professionals are supposed to use their offices, skills and opportunities to defend the gospel and serve humanity and not end up in money gathering.

1.3 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

- A. Many Christian professionals generally have biased attitude towards involvement in missions.
- B Many Christian professionals are excited in being part of foreign missions but do not have the time.
- C Christian professionals are more excited about giving to missions than being involved in missions.
- D The lifestyles of many Christian professionals are not witnessing for Christ in their work place.

UNDERSTANDING INVOLVEMENT OF PROFESSIONALS IN MISSIONS

2.1 Professionals in the Bible

2.1.1 Joseph

Joseph had a full-time job and knew the special times and seasons he lived in, preparing a nation to thrive in the midst of difficult times. He experienced the supernatural, influenced leaders, stewarded great resources, spared a nation from famine; and he built a new city, Goshen.

Joseph was a senior government official in Pharaoh's court; and as such, could be considered a professional. God used him in a very powerful way to advance His Kingdom in those days. Joseph helped preserve God's people from extinction during an extreme famine. He was not a farmer or other artisan of the working class. He was a high level civil servant and a part of the royal family. Joseph was not a prophet, priest or musician. He was not involved in the 'spiritual' ministries that we often associate with those offices. Joseph was simply a government officer. However, he was a man of character, a man of compassion and a man of prayer. And Joseph became one of the most-loved and respected men in the Bible. Joseph's life demonstrates that you can be a man of God in a non-Christian professional environment.

2.1.2 Daniel

The book of Daniel presents a picture of Daniel from his point of training until he was an old man. After his education, for the rest of his life, he served as a professional government administrator. He worked his way up until he was the number three person in the whole nation. Daniel also demonstrates that you can be a holy and prayerful professional even when surrounded by evil. As such, he became one of the biblical heroes. He was able to serve God very effectively from his position of honor and influence.

2.1.3 Luke

Luke was a physician. Physicians are usually well trained specialists and are clearly recognized as professionals. It is interesting that we see Luke using his training for something that he was not trained to do. He became a researcher, historian and a writer. Although these skills do not overlap his skills as a physician, his professional training made it easier for him to learn another professional skill on his own. Luke's professional training and his writing of the books of Luke and Acts has made a tremendous contribution to Christianity. Can you imagine how much poorer Christianity would be today if we did not have the writings of this professional, Luke?

There are many other people who might also be thought of as professionals, such as Moses, Asaph, Nehemiah, and even the prophets who were professional spokesmen for God. The Centurion who sent for Peter and was filled with the Holy Spirit was a professional soldier. Market place Christians such as Joseph, Esther, Daniel, Nehemiah, Lydia, Priscilla and Aquila were very prominent among God's people.

2.2 A Crisis of Vision

Many market place Christians feel purposeless, meaningless, visionless and aimless. Market place Christians are often encouraged to stop spending so much time in the market place and throw themselves into ministry. The attitude is that the market place is devoid of ministry activities.

2.3 The Crisis of Value

Our work should be as unto the Lord. God is the real boss. There should be no ambition, no terrorism, and no politics. We must treat our tasks as from God. We must work without changing our motives. What counts to God is not the task but the motivations of our heart.

There is a gap between Sunday and Monday and between the Church and the work world or marketplace today and the priest and laity.

2.4 Sunday-Monday Gap

The Sunday-Monday, faith-work gap must be bridged. Yet for this to happen, we need to understand how big the gap is and how it came about. The fault lies with both lay people and the clergy. Over 70 years ago, G.A. Stoddert Kennedy asserted that:

A very large number of the people who attend our services and partake of the sacrament are disassociated personalities. They are one person on Sunday and another on Monday. They have one mind for the sanctuary and another for the street. They have one conscience for the church and another for the cotton factory. Their worship conflicts with their work. In their defense, many marketplace Christians, including increasing numbers of paid working women, feel justifiably marginalized from their churches. Thousands make up the rapidly increasing legion of unchurched Christians in the West. Their workaday concerns are often banished from the pulpit and public worship, prayer and pastoral care. In one survey, 90-97% said they had never heard a sermon on work. One Christian in Singapore who suggested a commissioning service on Teachers Day was told by his pastor that it was a great idea for Sunday school teachers.

Alternatively, marketplace Christians, whether in the West or developing world, often feel that their work place concerns are trivialized or stereotyped when pastors, Christian academics or church social justice and welfare agencies speak from judgmental ignorance on business and economics. Many Christian business people feel like they are second-class citizens in the church.

2.5 Bridging the Sunday-Monday Gap

In the Scriptures, there is no ancient or modern, eastern or western dualistically derived gap between private and public, faith and work, charity and justice. There we have many images of God as a worker (Genesis 1-2, John 5:17, Revelation 21:5), specifically as a shepherd (Psalm 23),

a warrior (Exodus 15:3), a teacher (Psalm 143:10, Proverbs 15:33), a potter (Jeremiah 18:6, Romans 9:20-21) and as a vine dresser (Isaiah 5:1-7, John 15:1-6).

‘We are God’s workmanship/masterpiece/work of art created in Christ Jesus to do good work(s), which God prepared in advance for us to do’ (Ephesians 2:10) and *‘stop stealing and do good or useful work so you can share with the needy’* (Ephesians 4:28). Note also 6:8 concerning the work of slaves and masters: *‘You know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free’*. ‘Good work’ has the overall meaning of “quality work”, that is going about our daily work in a way that is both ethical and attractive.’

“ To bridge the gap in our partial perceptions of God’s work, we need to be more thoroughly Trinitarian instead of having in practice a Unitarian (one person) theology playing favorites with the Trinity”, says John Stodd. Christ is primary in relation to reconciliation, the Spirit in transformation and completion. Yet they work together. Individuals, institutions and market place ministries often grasp one aspect of the Trinity’s work and highlight their own particular gifts as the greatest and compete with one another.

2.6 Spirituality in the World of Work

Spirituality is about discovering and responding to the presence and purposes of God in every context, every task, every relationship and every moment of every day.

2.7 Finding God at the Centre

This spirituality of the Centre is the spirituality for the market place, one that presses into the demands, joys and challenges of work as a place to encounter the presence and purposes of God. It is a spirituality that arises out of the certainty that God is as profoundly present at the work bench as God is at the communion table. It flourishes in the knowledge that the Spirit is as present in the

gifts expressed in the work place on Monday as in those expressed in the worship space on Sunday, for they will always be occasional, accounting for only a small portion of daily life.

The challenge is to find ways to discern and respond to the presence of God in the midst of the market place and not only away from it. If Christians are not equipped for such discernment and response, then they are doomed to living the majority of their lives feeling as though they are sitting on the spiritual sidelines while others take center stage with God.

2.8 Making Churches Market place Friendly

The future of the church will be decided by how effectively the people of God are equipped and supported to live out their faith in the world. Local churches have a crucial role to play in equipping and supporting their members for this missionary encounter. However, this vision of growing the Kingdom of God in the world is larger than just growing a local congregation. It is our conviction that growing congregations alone is not a big enough vision to facilitate effective ministry in the world. However, to change our focus to pursue this larger vision towards an emphasis on week day mission, beyond just Sunday gathering, will require a significant change in our priorities, the allocation of our resources, and the models of ministry that shape our practice.

2.9. Constraints of Professionals' Missions

There are several factors that have been noted that affect missions generally and especially the professional missions. They include economic, family, language and culture, time, funding and so on. Culture is often seen as the key inhibitor of effective knowledge sharing. Someone studied companies where sharing knowledge is built into the culture; and he found out that they did not change their culture to match their knowledge management initiatives. Culture and languages of people affect professionals input as in most cases they will have to learn the language.

Job satisfaction is not primarily attained by a fair wage, decent conditions, security and a measure of participations in profits, important as these are. It arises from the job itself, and especially from that exclusive thing, “significance”. Moreover, the main component of significance in relation to our job is not even the combination of skill, effort and achievement, but the sense that through it we are contributing to the service of community and of God Himself. It is service which brings satisfaction, discovering ourselves in ministering to others.

3.0 Work is a Personal Issue

Work is a personal issue in the attitudes we have to work; the involvement we have with our work; and the outcomes we get from our work. Work is one of the key ways in which we express our Christian character. It is evident from how we do our work whether we are honest, efficient and trustworthy, and we must strive to be people with ethical problems which are difficult to resolve. We must never forget that it is an expression of Christian character and we should never give people cause to be sarcastic about the Christian faith because there is a gulf between what we claim and what we do.

One of the reactions to the advent of automation is an increased trend towards the personalization of work. We live in the age of the portfolio workers who seek to be in control of what they are doing at all costs. In evaluating work, we need to be aware of the impact of work on people, not only in terms of new technology, but also in terms of potentially isolating working conditions.

3.1 Why Christian Professionals prefer to give to Missions than going to Mission Field

The missions mandate demands that everybody is involved both the goers and the supporters but most often several professionals prefer to support while others go. In the understanding of investment concept, Barrister Victor Tukura in his book, *The Greatest Investors* said that the purpose of worldly wealth is for heavenly investment so that we can be welcomed into heavenly

dwellings. This also makes many professionals invest heavily on the mission projects as stakeholders in the mission projects.

3.2 **Witness in the World of Work – The issue of lifestyle**

The importance of witness at work is affirmed by the Lausanne Covenant's definition of evangelism which says, "*Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism...*"

The work is seen mostly to be of lesser importance than the work of gospel proclamation. This division of work into what is important (gospel proclamation) and what is less important (work itself) defeats witness at work because it lacks integrity and down-plays the cultural mandate (Genesis 1:28) and persecution in the workplace. In a pluralistic workplace we must earn the right to be heard through the way we work (1 Peter 2:11-12; 1 Corinthians 9:19-22; John 17:14-15). In times of persecution, our faithfulness to Jesus will be tested (John 15:18-20; 2 Timothy 3:12). Faith that withstands opposition and trials can be a powerful witness to those who may have heard the gospel but have not seen it demonstrated practically (1 Peter 1:6-7). Witness at work through presence, proclamation and practice will bear fruit in discipleship (Matthew 28:18-20). New disciples need work place models of what it means to serve God faithfully (Philippians 4:9). Small groups at work organized around the application of God's word in the Bible to the work context will be a support to new disciples (Hebrews 10:25). Work places and businesses that evidence converted work (Colossians 3:24) will be a witness to the market place that believers serve a different God than money (Matthew 6:24; Hebrews 13:5).

Witness at work is indispensable to the cause of world evangelization especially in the context of economic globalization. Gospel truth that is not concretely demonstrated cannot be recommended with integrity. Believers at work are uniquely positioned to be for our world what Jesus was for His world, a tangible demonstration of the love of God in bodily form. As Paul puts it, you are

“children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life...” (Philippians 2:15-16).

4.0 OUR DISCOVERIES

The study investigated the involvements of professionals in missions using the Nigeria Christian Graduate Fellowship as a case study. I further looked at the recommendations of professionals to serving as missionaries, as well as the factors affecting professionals’ involvement in missions, the kind of missions that the professionals were involved in and the professionals’ view of their involvements in missions. The various aspects of missions that professionals can be involved in were looked at; and the view on the perception about the more relevant groups needed in missions work. The conclusion was drawn by looking at the issue of full time work not being a good work for professionals.

4.1

Professionals were asked how they view the importance of professionals in missions; 61% affirmed that it is very important; 31% also answered that it is important; only 2% did not agree that it is important; and 6% were uncertain about it.

Again, respondents were asked whether missionary work was not a good work for professionals; and many of them disagreed with the statement, in that they attested to the fact that missionary work is a good job for professionals. 66% affirmed that missionary work cannot be said to be not a good work for professionals. Respondents also recommended positively to support any professional who wants to join missions. While none of the respondents indicated discouraging such a person, only 10% were uncertain about any recommendation. Again, in assessing the attitude of Christian professionals towards

missions, the responses of respondents towards a person who wants to become a missionary, shows that 36% of respondents indicated that they will recommend professionals as missionaries; 37% indicated evangelists; while 23% of the persons recommended young people.

Their responses also show that 61% confirmed that professionals' involvement in missions is very important, while 31% agreed that it is important. This means that 92% affirmed that it is important that professionals get involved in missions. Only 2% felt it is not important.

We noted also that respondents considered all the issues including time, funding and lifestyle as factors that affect the involvement of professionals. However top on the list of these given hindrances was time. Although time is 21% in respect of all the questions asked, 61% of the persons generally believed that time is a major factor towards the professionals' involvement in missions. 52 % of the respondents were more excited about giving and praying than joining the going team. Our observation is that it is still part of the fact that most time it seems that praying for and supporting the missions work is easier.

Many Christian professionals are excited about being part of missions, but they do not have the time. In this case whether for foreign or local missions, many professionals though excited about it and even want to be involved, have to contend with time. In this case, joining a missions team will not be a serious problem for a professional, especially if it is where he or she can use his or her profession, but usually there is hardly enough time for it.

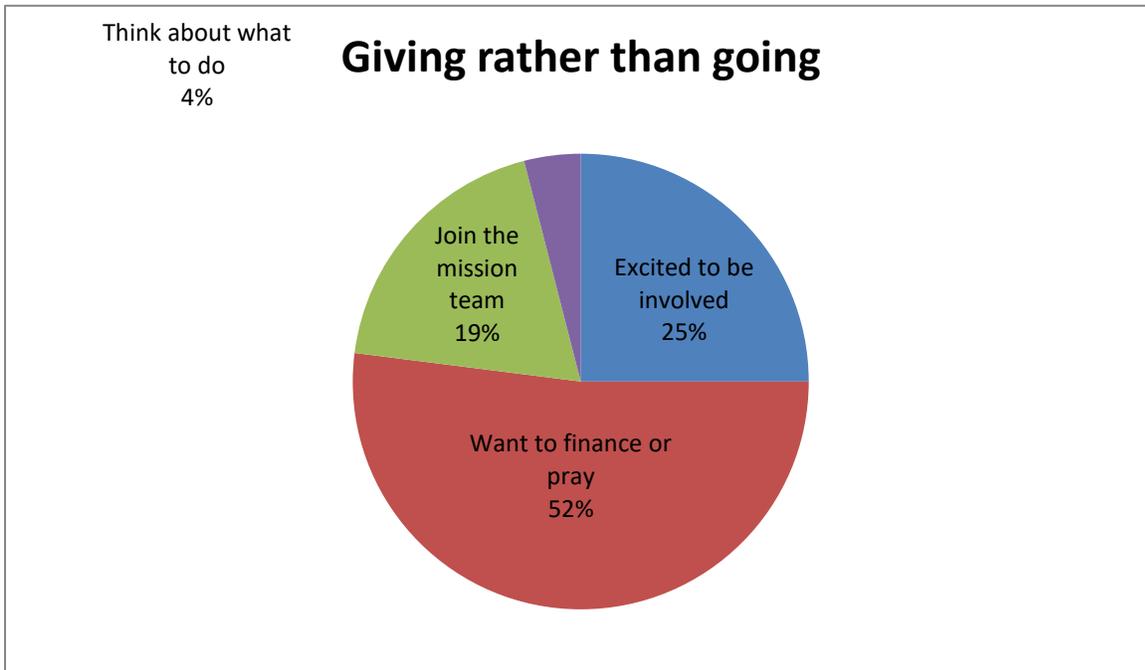


Figure 1: Giving rather

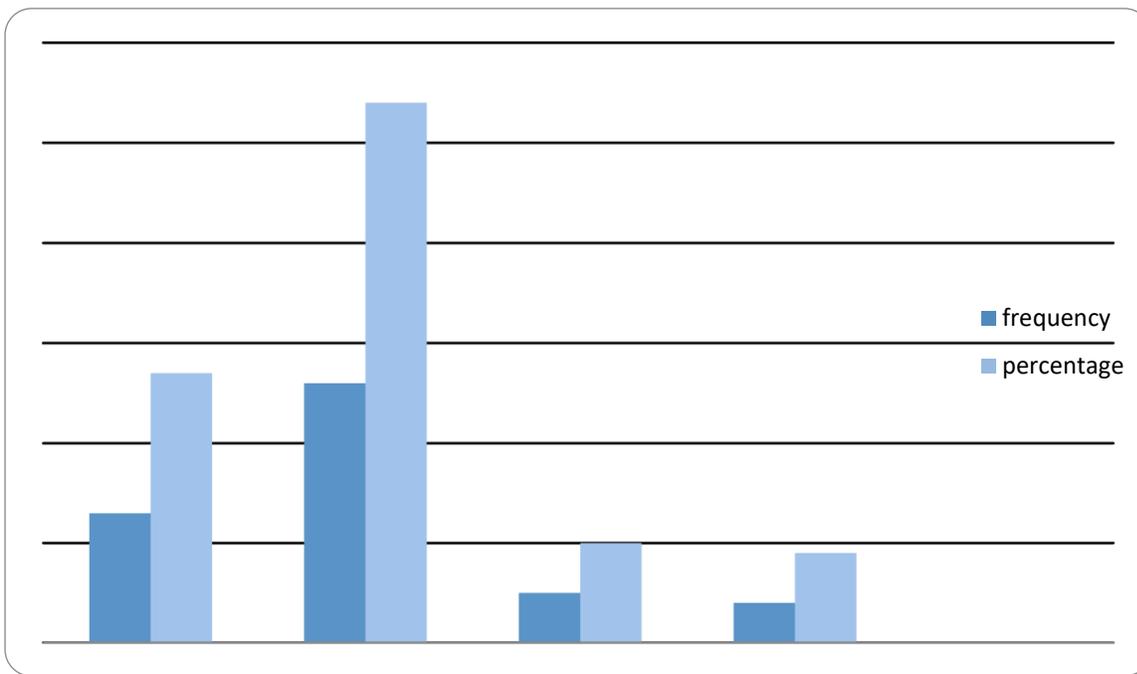


Figure 2 .

A Banker who has been a mission supporter wants to join full missionary service

Figure 2 shows the responses to the case of a banker who desires to leave his job and join the missions team. 27% and 54% of the respondents agreed to strongly recommend him and recommend him respectively. 10% disagreed and 9% strongly disagreed to recommend such a person. No respondent indicated never to recommend him.

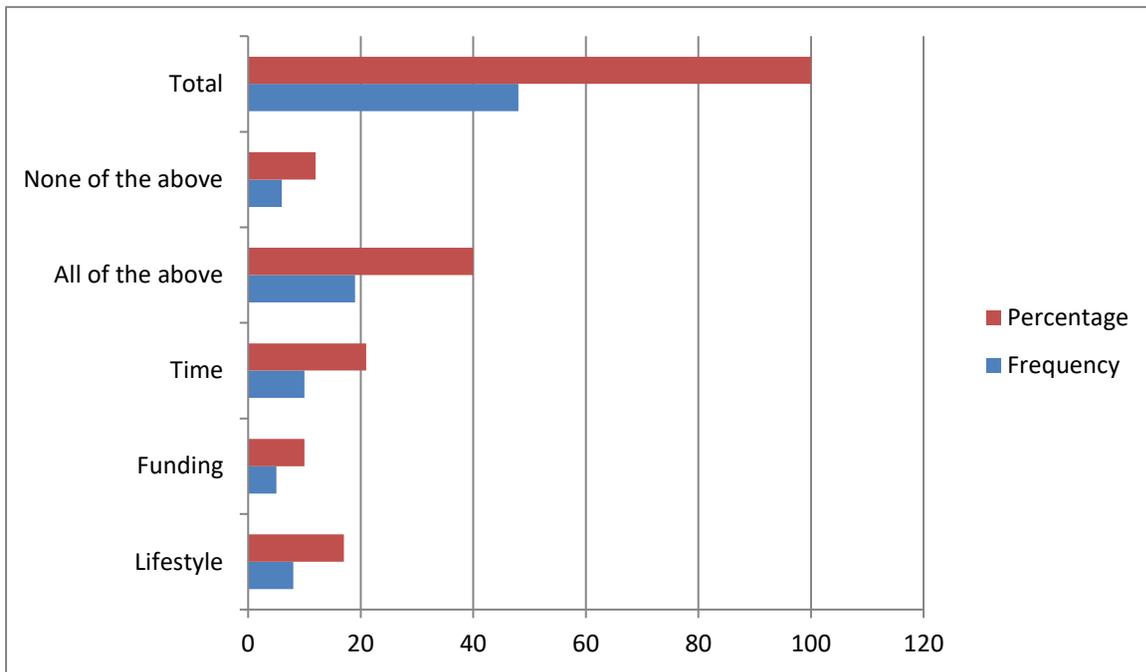


Figure 3: Issue of Lifestyle

The respondents affirmed that lifestyle is a major factor affecting the professionals' involvement in missions. Although many persons responded that time is critical, it is true that lifestyle is also a major factor in ministry. Whereas 17% of the respondents indicated that lifestyle is a factor, 40% indicated that time, funding and lifestyle are factors that affect professionals' involvement in missions. From this we can deduce that 57% affirmed that lifestyle is a factor.

Many of the people interviewed also confirmed that lifestyle has been a critical factor that hinders the work of missions in the work place.

5. RECOMENDATIONS

Discipleship and offering teachings on the lifestyle of Christians to our members will be necessary to continue to expunge a lifestyle that is not consistent with our call to reach the world with the gospel.

My recommendation also will be that apart from the usual outreaches of the Nigeria Christian Graduate Fellowship through the Africa Vision Tract House which is the mission arm of the fellowship, in collaboration and partnership with several other Christian groups, the Fellowship should create more rooms for members to join mission teams.

It is therefore important to catch on this interest; and the leadership of the Nigeria Christian Graduate Fellowship and other groups should carry out more mission awareness and sensitization programs among members of the Fellowship, as well as create more opportunities for their involvements.

We have also seen that many young people needed to be mobilized during this survey. Therefore, older members should encourage the young people extensively to get involved during missions outreaches.

In view of these, the Africa Professionals Resource Missions as an organization will intensify its mobilization effort within the Nigeria Christian Graduate Fellowship, and other fellowship groups in Nigeria whose hearts are opened, not only to go for missions but also to encourage every person around them to be involved in missions. The greatest problem causing low level of involvements may be low dissemination of information and the fear that has hindered people from reaching out to professionals in such a way that they can move out for missions with their professions.

While we keep on mobilizing professionals to be involved in missions, enough notice must be given to them so they can adjust their schedules to be involved; and we can include some weekend outreaches, foreign missions outreaches and church planting work.

It is also important to note that we will never have enough time to do all the good things that we would like to do. It therefore means that professionals must put the missions work as a priority in their time schedule to enable them fit in; and this also includes the use of their holidays, sabbaticals, etc to be involved in missions.

6. CONCLUSION

As we conclude, professionals must prepare:

To Integrate– Professionals must be interwoven witnesses in the work.

For Integrity – Professionals must keep the standard, no compromise.

To Interact – Professionals must learn to relate with the people they serve. Isolation may not help us much in pushing our gospel agenda.

To Intervene – Professionals must position themselves to be problem solvers. We must not continue to complain about the routines but look for the solution. Light is never afraid of darkness.

Witness at Work is indispensable to the cause of world evangelization. Believers at work are uniquely positioned to be for our world what Jesus was for His world, a tangible demonstration of the love of God in bodily form.

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7. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- A) How should will influence the attitude of professionals towards involvement in missions?
- B) What are your views to help reduce constraints towards Christian professionals participating in foreign missions?
- C) Since Christian professionals prefer to give to missions than to personally go to the mission fields; How should this affect more goers in Africa as funding is still major challenge to missions in Africa
- D) How does the lifestyle of Christian professionals affect their involvement in missions where you are? Give practical examples

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