

Considering Bible College?

Q. Who needs Bible College?

While any Christian would benefit from a shorter or longer period set aside for studying the Bible, it is of particular importance for anyone anticipating Christian service at home or overseas.

Q. What's the difference between Bible training and mission training?

Of course, the two overlap; any worthwhile study of the Bible will include mission as a major element within it, and any worthwhile study of mission will draw heavily on biblical data. Nevertheless, there are centres in the UK whose main outcome focus is on biblical and theological understanding, usually for ministry in the UK, and there are others which are intentionally focused on communicating the Gospel effectively cross-culturally (see websites below).

Although it has to be recognised that increasingly every country is becoming more culturally plural and that most Bible Colleges would express that awareness, someone who is contemplating cross-cultural ministry would be well-advised to prepare in a centre that has that focus among its stated priorities.

Q. Academic or practical?

Training or preparation should be a means to an end and not an end in itself. So choose a programme that you believe will equip you adequately for the sort of ministry that you believe God is calling you to.

Someone going into, say, afforestation work or dentistry in another country and who has already acquired the expertise and qualification appropriate for that, will probably not wish to spend another 3 years on earning a degree in theological studies. They will, however, recognise the importance of gaining practical cross-cultural wisdom and skills, so they will look for a mission training centre that provides a more practical, less academically theological programme.

Conversely, someone who believes that God is calling them into theological education, student evangelism or Bible translation, will probably see the value of thorough Biblical and theological preparation. This might well lead them to embark on a 2 or 3 year programme in a centre that provides deeper engagement with the Biblical and cross-cultural issues.

Q. Residential or distance-learning?

There are many distance-learning and e-learning (internet-based) programmes available. Their advantages are numerous: no need to uproot and move far away; study at home or on the train or anywhere, at any time of day or night; cut out some of the expense, etc.

However, distance-learning can lose out to residential programmes because the latter affords: undistracted focus on studies, experience of living in close community with people of many different nationalities and cultures (an invaluable part of cross-cultural preparation in itself), frequent contact with a tutor, and learning in community rather than in isolation, providing limitless opportunities for debate, discussion, conversation, etc. You will need to weigh up the respective pro's and con's.

Q. Recognised qualification or not?

A college's in-house programme that is not nationally recognised may still be very valuable, and if assessment does not include passing exams, can provide a less stressful learning experience! Again, the question is, would your mission career be enhanced by going for a theological degree?

Many countries insist that a visitor seeking a work permit should have a recognised qualification, so without one it would be difficult to enter or reside in the country. In addition, having a qualification could be helpful if the opportunity for mission service unexpectedly closes and you need to relocate and seek employment back in the UK.

Q. Training in the West or in the country of mission service?

Some are choosing to do their Bible and mission training in the country in which they hope to serve. The advantages are obvious: cultural adjustment can be going on day by day as the programme of study progresses; the programme can cost less; insights from the studies can be tested and applied within the host culture in a way that would be difficult back home; issues relevant to the host context can be discussed with staff and fellow-students from that context, etc.

However, it is possible that facilities and resources overseas might not be what they would be back in the homeland, language proficiency may be an issue, and the qualification gained might not carry the same international recognition as would be the case for training undertaken in the UK.

Further information:

Websites such as www.ukbiblecolleges.com, www.christianvocations.org and www.oscar.org.uk provide information about a very wide range of residential and distance-learning Bible-training programmes. Prospectuses and programme outlines can be downloaded or sent for through any of the individual websites listed.

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Read more...

[Click here](#) to read Gordon Molyneux's article: *Bible College - yes or no?* which first appeared in SIM-UK's magazine in 2008.

