Practical Religion

David Nasmith and the City Mission Movement

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Practical Religion:
David Nasmith and the City Mission Movement
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Practical Religion

Lose the Chains of Injustice
Untie the Cords of the Yoke
Set the Oppressed Free
Break Every Yoke
Share Your Food With the Hungry
Provide the Poor Wanderer With Shelter
When You See the Naked Clothe Them
Do Not Turn Away From Your Own Flesh and Blood
Then You Will Call and the Lord Will Answer
Then You Will Cry for Help and
He Will Say Here Am I
Isaiah 58:6-9 NIV

For I Was Hungry and
You Gave Me Something to Eat
I was Thirsty and
You Gave Me Something to Drink
I was a Stranger and
You Invited Me In
I Needed Clothes and
You Clothed Me
I Was Sick and
You Looked After Me
I Was In Prison and
You Came to Visit Me
Matthew 25:36 NIV

I honored Him and Glorified Him Who Lives Forever
His kingdom Endures

From Generation to Generation
No One Can Hold Back His hand
Or Say to Him
What Are You Doing?
Daniel 4:34-35 NIV
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“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruits you will know them.” Matthew 7:19-20 NKJV “Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, 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 NIV

“O that I may be found walking in the narrow path, and doing the will of the Lord by shining as a light in the world of moral darkness! The people of God must bring forth ‘much fruit’; the Lord is not glorified by little.” David Nasmith

Have you ever stood in a place and thought this is a solemn and important moment in your life? My husband and I had that experience a number of years ago as we entered the former foundry that had become Wesleyan Chapel in London, England. We stood where the great reformer John Wesley had reached the suffering poor of London.

The place was old and musty and had become a museum of Wesley’s accomplishments. A water pitcher with the likeness of Wesley on it stood on a little old table. The floors creaked as we walked into the little chapel room. Steve took my hand, and we knelt solemnly before the Lord. We rededicated our lives to Him and the work among the least, the last, and the lost that He had called us to. We rose from our knees and sat down on a hard, narrow wooden pew and talked for a long time about how God had used John Wesley to reform society.

We then crossed the street and entered Bunhill Fields cemetery. The paper guide to the cemetery showed how to find the tombstones of many famous Christian leaders. As we walked through the cemetery, we like most other people knew nothing of the great reformer David Nasmith, who is also buried there.

David Nasmith had the zeal of Whitefield, and the wisdom of Wesley. He had all their devotion, with a better apprehension of the gospel of mercy than they enjoyed at the outset of their mighty careers. (Dr. John Campbell was pastor of Whitefield’s Tabernacle and editor of the British Banner.)

David Nasmith deserves to be kept in mind. He originated the Young Men’s Christian Association in Glasgow, and set the institution at work in other cities and around the world. His life work was noted for being instrumental in welding the various denominations together for useful purposes. In 1821 he became secretary of the “Religious Societies of Glasgow” at the “Institution Rooms,” 59 Glasswork Street. Nasmith possessed a marvelous power of organization and capacity for work. He was a true reformer, and thoroughly sincere in his endeavors to benefit others. He founded City Missions and Young Men’s Christian Associations. (A. G. Callant, author of “Saint Mungo Bells”)
Clubs and associations, missions and societies were in his blood. So many of them could claim him as founder that it is doubtful whether, at the age of thirty-six, he could have kept an accurate record of them all. As a founder of missions, it would be hard to find his equal. (Phyllis Thompson, author of “To the Heart of the City”) 

Unlike other reformers, no church or college has been named after Nasmith. It would be preposterous that an image of him would be enshrined on a water pitcher or in a church window. No church doctrine or point of theology is attributed to him. What can be found all over the world is the fruit of his vision in the form of City Missions, practical religion outside the walls of the church.

Today, across the world tens of thousands of needy people will be helped by City Missions. Within different cultures, languages, and governments committed Christians provide physical and spiritual help to the most needy. It is important to reform society and to take His message of love and personal salvation to those who do not come into the doors of the church. As we enter the new millennium, City Missions are large, effective Christian ministries. God has blessed many missions with beautiful buildings.

Practical religion of our living Lord  
Is not found in buildings, but in building lives.  
From despair to hope  
From anger to joy  
From fear to courage  
From hate to love

Many of the City Missions have lasted for over one hundred fifty years. Wars, governments, and churches have come and gone. Other institutions that were built on Biblical truths no longer provide physical and spiritual care based on those truths. The missions stand as a testament of God’s love proclaimed and lived out by His people.

Why has Nasmith's vision of City Mission been able to last?  
First, it was God-given by the Holy Spirit.  
Second, the Bible was its foundation.  
Third, it was practical religion applied.

My original research on David and Frances Nasmith was part of a larger project that included the city gospel rescue missions around the world from 1799-1997. The fruit of these missions amazed me. That project became a book “Women Who Changed the Heart of the City” (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids Michigan, USA.). The book tells how women and often their husbands were called by God and empowered by him to change the heart of their cities one heart at a time.

Charles W. Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship Ministries, wrote one of the endorsements. “This book provides a powerful apologetic to a secular society on the importance of the Christian faith lived out by caring people.” It is my prayer and hope that this booklet will do the same.

How did one man and his wife carry their God-given vision from Scotland to Ireland, United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Europe? How did City Missions continue to
spread to Africa, Australia, and India even after their deaths? How did the City Mission vision develop and mobilize committed Christians to change the heart of their cities one heart at a time?

City Missions today have various names. Many have the name of their city first and may include gospel or rescue. The programs and methods vary around the world. It is hard to put them in a “box.” They vary from elderly programs, to street meetings, to extensive rehabilitation. The list could go on and on. Each mission relates to its culture and local needs. Mission staffs range from one person to thousands. The missions have in common; the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scripture, freedom and the vision of David Nasmith.

City Missions around the world often have a city map on the wall. The map has pinpoints where the need is the greatest or the crime is the worst. Each pin represents a City Mission Center. We must always remember that City Mission is not so much a “place” as it is a “people” whose hearts are filled with the love of God. Christians that “shine like stars,” reflecting the light of Jesus into the worst neighborhoods of their cities. Practical religion that helps others lived out in daily life. A powerful shining light that travels from century to century, from one city missionary to another.

Why is it difficult if not impossible to find David Nasmith’s name in libraries or the history of most City Missions? David did not want control or, to bring glory to himself. He gave God the glory for “His great and good work,” The purpose of this booklet is not to bring glory to Nasmith but to bring glory to God.
2 Before You Were Born

“Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.’ Then said I: ‘Ah Sovereign Lord,’ I said, ‘I do not know how to speak I am only a child.’ But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, ‘I am only a child,’ you must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,’ declares the Lord.” Jeremiah 1:5-8 NIV

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“God has a great and good work to perform and I have a privilege to sound the alarm and call the Lord’s host to battle.” David Nasmith

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Today around the world in nation after nation City Missions are helping women. Many of them are teenagers and have been abused, raped, and are homeless. Often they are pregnant and are not married. Fear and despair have been a part of their young lives to a degree that most of us have never experienced. They need to know that God loves them. It is for these women and the city missionaries who love them that I include the story of Thenew:

A daughter of Loth, King of the Lothians, she refused to marry the suitor whom her father had found for her, because of her adherence to the Christian faith. She was cast out of her house and became a swine herder (one who tends swine). Thenew was pursued and raped by her suitor. She became pregnant as a result of this, and when the pregnancy became evident, her father ordered her to be stoned to death. She was thrown from the top of a mountain, but was miraculously saved.

The new gave birth to a son about 518 AD, in Culross in Fife. His name was Mungo. Some believe Mungo was the first to bring the gospel to Glasgow. The cathedral of Glasgow was built in his honor. Today over fourteen hundred years after his birth, Mungo is better known as St. Kentigen. Thenew became the first battered, raped, and unmarried mother in the recorded history of Scotland.

One cannot help but wonder, did Thenew not only pray for her son but did she also pray for generations to come? I do not know. However, God knew Mungo before he was formed in his mother’s womb. So it is with every baby born, no matter the circumstances, rich or poor.

What makes a baby grow up and become a great leader for good? Is it genes, environment, or the choices they make? A hybrid wheat seed that has all the potential to produce good wheat still needs to be planted in good soil, watered, and exposed to sunshine before it can produce good, useful wheat.

The environment, the world that David Nasmith was born into, had no more evil or good in it than the world has today. The turn of a new century was marked with suffering. Wars raged across Europe, leaving many homeless and without hope. There was no shortage of
pain, greed, or suffering. The laws of man sanctioned the slave trade it was not until 1807 that those laws started to change.

The crowning achievement of Wilberforce and his colleagues was their leading role in the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. (To be followed in 1833 by the elimination of slavery itself in all the British possessions.)

The great reformers Luther, Knox, Wesley, Zwingli, and Xavier all had died. Glasgow was growing and, like other cities, had built many churches. At the same time more lives crumbled away under the pressure of city life.

Did God look upon the earth and see the poor flooding into Glasgow looking for work and a better way of life, during the dawn of the Industrial revolution? Did He see the hopes of many of the poor crushed? Did God see the growth in prostitution and crime?

Just as God does today, he saw and heard it all! He heard every heartbeat and every cry of despair. His heart overflowed with true love and compassion. The struggle between good and evil, between God and the devil within the heart of humanity is as old as creation.

The Lord knew there needed to be a new mission system for the new kind of city that Glasgow was becoming. He also knew that other cities of the world would follow the same pattern of development. In whose heart would the struggle between good and evil be won by God so that the Holy Spirit could whisper a plan for a new effective mission system?

The world noticed when the first president of the United States, George Washington, died in 1799. Only a few noticed the birth of David to F. Mungo and Jean (Dick) Nasmith on March 21, 1799, in Glasgow, Scotland. His grandfather was Mungo Nasmith the self-taught architect of St. Andrews Church.

The Nasmiths were members of the college church. They assumed that some day David would attend the university. He was one of the few children whose families could afford the City Grammar School. He was not a good student. He would not pay attention or study. His worst subject was language, which made it hard for him to learn other subjects. By the time he was eleven his teachers believed he had learned “absolutely nothing.”

Nasmith’s mother and father thought that his education would be best served by preparing him for business. Like thousands of other youth in the early 1800s, he became a “bound apprentice.” His parents knew that whoever David was “bound to” would have a great influence on his life. They found a pious manufacturer who lived a good Christian life. Soon, however, the business failed and was sold to a wicked man. David was sold like machinery in the deal, youth caught up in the painful evils of the industrial revolution.

While David was under the control of the pious manufacturer there was not much for his mother to be concerned about. All that changed when the business was sold.

It was the custom of the day that the bound apprentices lived in the place of business. The workdays were long, sometimes from six in the morning too after midnight. Often the food provided did not taste good and the portions were small. Several youth slept in the same room, often in the same bed. The youth were not allowed to visit their family or
friends. There was no room for recreation or reading, and often the young men would go to the tavern. “Often the good and the bad, the novice in life and the veteran to sin, the young in years and the ‘old stager’ occupied the same bedroom.”

This was the environment that brought David face to face with the misery of those who lived in the slums, those who felt the weight of city life upon them to the breaking point. Evil was out in the open and rampant. Throughout his life Nasmith wrote and spoke of this time:

When I look back to the many sins, which I then committed, unknown to man, they make me tremble! When tempted, I often prayed to God for deliverance, but sin remained as a sweet morsel under my tongue. When I look back upon the life which I have altogether spent in sin, I feel constrained with the apostle Paul to acknowledge that I am the ‘chief of sinners’ and with the publican of old cry out, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner;’ reckoning it a faithful saying, and worthy of my most cordial acceptation, that ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.’

While he was a bound apprentice, David continued to go to Sabbath school. He was fourteen when two of his Sabbath school friends asked him to help form the “Glasgow Youths’ Bible Association,” for the purpose of distributing Bibles to the poor.
3 Despise Not Your Youth

“Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” I Timothy 4:12 KJV “Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.” I Timothy 4:12 NIV

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“I got acquainted with a number of pious young men whose walk and conversation were very consistent, which led me to often think about the contents of the Bible.” David Nasmith

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How often have you heard the phrase, “Walk the talk?” The foundation of it is found in the above Bible verses. We as believers are to live the way we speak. Paul giving advice to young Timothy wrote, “Let no man despise thy youth.” Timothy became a great leader while he was still a youth. Down through the centuries God continues to use the young people.

Many of the leaders in mission work today were reached while they were young. They may have gone to mission camp, lived in a mission home, or volunteered as a college student. Some, like Nasmith, learned from other young people how to “walk the talk.”

David was only fourteen years old when two of his school friends invited him to a meeting. They wanted to give Bibles to the poor. They sang a hymn and asked God for His blessing and to guide them in their plans.

They agreed on the name, “Glasgow Youths' Bible Association” They chose David to be the secretary. He did not understand the meaning of the word or the duties of the office. Accepting the position was the first choice David made that would change his life. That would bring change to his heart and ultimately bring practical religion to the cities of the world.

David wrote in his journal,

From the office I held, I got acquainted with a number of pious young men whose walk and conversation were very consistent. Which led me to often think about the contents of the Bibles we were giving to others. I found an increasing interest in what it said. I was led to see myself as a guilty polluted sinner. In the sight of an infinitely pure and holy God and my heart desperately wicked. I was unable to do anything to satisfy Divine justice. Often did I try to improve my conduct, but as often did I find that, as a leopard cannot change its spots, no more can they who have been accustomed to do evil learn to do good.

By continuing to search the Scriptures, I found One, Jesus, who could deliver not only from the punishment, but also from the power of sin. He appeared all together as the one
I stood in need of a Savior all-sufficient yes, mighty to save! This was followed with a hatred of those sinful thoughts which I had formerly cherished and an earnest desire after holiness of heart. The preaching of the gospel became to me a delight. I longed for the return of the Sabbath.\textsuperscript{11}

Nasmith was sixteen when he joined in fellowship the church on Nile Street. One year later he wrote of his struggles:

I have walked the last year as I said I would, making Jesus my King and turning away from the Devil and my own lust! But how far short I have come! Often have I fallen.\textsuperscript{12} Oh thou Holy Spirit, consume the power of sin within me. Dwell within me and make me all together what you would have me be! May thy will be mine.\textsuperscript{13}

I enjoy flattery and enjoy being with the learned and the great. I sat down at the Lord’s Supper and had to run out of the church in the rain thinking I should quit being a teacher of children. I ran home, stayed up reading my Bible, and, having cast myself upon the Lord, I went to sleep.

It is at this point many young Christians allow Satan to take away their joy and power, not David! He knew he had a problem. He was honest with himself and God. He studied the Bible and poured out his soul to the Lord in prayer. He grew stronger and the Holy Spirit became as much a “comforter” as a “convicter of sin.”

Through all his struggles, David’s pastor and the men of the church did not give up on him. They encouraged and guided him much like Paul did with Timothy. He grew in the Lord and became “an example to the believers in word, in conversation, in charity.” God started to use him in a mighty way. By the time David was seventeen, he had two hundred children in his Sabbath Evening School class.

A boy attending the Sabbath school came to know the Lord. While he was praying at home, his father took a whip and beat him severely. The boy started to pray outside in a field. One night his father took his whip and followed the boy. When he came close, he stopped and heard his son pray for him. The boy turned around and saw his father crying. When they both joined a church, the father was asked to tell of his faith. He said, “No, let my son do it first, he is my spiritual father.”

David regularly visited the families of his students. He learned what the problems were and the conditions the poor lived in. He did not realize it, but God was forming the foundation blocks of City Mission in his young heart. Like Jesus, we must go to the poor, and we must do more than talk. He learned that giving the poor a Bible did not help them if they could not read. What they needed was practical religion in the form of a friend.

Nasmith visited one woman for a long time. Her husband was a slave and she was very poor. She came to his church and attended his classes. He paid for reading lessons for her and bought her a Bible. They often talked of the Lord’s Table in heaven, “where there is neither bond or free, and the distinctions now made by man will be forever unknown.” When her husband did come home, he would beat her. When freedom was granted to the slaves, Mary Watt returned to the West Indies, carrying with her Bibles and tracts.
Because David visited the poor where they lived, he could tell their story to the church and city officials. It became clear to him if people’s lives were to change; they needed to learn to read. The Sabbath schools for children up to the age of fourteen were not enough. The adults needed education also. He was only nineteen when “He took a very active share in the establishment of adult schools in Glasgow, in connection with the Sabbath Evening School Youths’ Union.”

David faithfully wrote to hundreds of students who were “stationed” in other cities as they moved from one manufacturer to another. Many of them became leaders for good. However, some became criminals. Six were banished to Botany Bay. Nasmith became the secretary to the “Bridewell Association,” whose purpose was the moral and religious improvement of male prisoners. He wrote in his journal:

On the evening of the 2nd, 'till 5:00 a.m., six of my Christian friends and I stayed with Baird and Blair. Two town officers were with us all night. Before they were hung, Blair gave me a piece of paper he had written on, ‘we were first seduced from the path of virtue by a man who invited us to his house on the Sabbath. We spent those days drinking. The man pretending to be a friend brought us in prostitutes.14

David continued in his journal to call the man that seduced his students a “monster of iniquity.” David had come to know the path to the gallows, drunkenness, debauchery, falsehood, theft, and robbery, the gallows.

Nasmith, still a teenager himself, had enough compassion and courage to be a friend to the end. He was not judgmental and he never thought he was any better than the prisoners he visited. Throughout his life he would say, "I am chief of sinners." He referred to everyone no matter his or her positions in life as “fellow sinners.” Whoever the suffering were, he believed and proclaimed, "there, but for the grace of God go I."
By the Grace of God

“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.” 1 Corinthians 15:9-10 NIV

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“Young men have been won to Christ. Those who were forced to associate with the infidel and licentious youth of their own age or masters of iniquity, have had their minds fortified and in their hour of imminent peril have been preserved or rescued.” David Nasmith

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Nasmith fell deeply in love with a young woman. His heart was deeply wounded when she rejected his offer of marriage. The pain of rejection was often and real. “My mind was set on preaching the everlasting gospel to my fellow sinners in Africa. The Theological Academy rejected me and this was a severe trial for me.’ The Lord’s ways are not as man’s ways.” He read an ad in the paper:

CLERK WANTED. A person acquainted with books and accounts to act as assistant secretary to the religious societies connected with the Institution Rooms at No. 59, Glassford Street. Must have bookkeeping and accounting experience, exceptional character and the interest of such societies at heart. Send application to Messrs. Chalmers and Collins.

In his application David wrote: “To promote the objects of such Institutions has been the delightful and interesting use of my leisure hours.” They accepted him. The committee members of the 23 societies were ministers and laymen from all sects and of all parties, both in religion and in politics. Many became his personal friend and daily companion. David’s job became not only a place of religious and philanthropic action, but of moral and intellectual education. The most distinguished men of the city became his personal friends.

David’s practical wisdom from his own life experience now flowed into a wider river of city life that would become practical religion.

He pondered about human nature and collected useful information from the great library of life. David also attended the lectures of Dr. M’Gill, Professor of Divinity at the University of Glasgow, and the Logic and Rhetoric course of Professor Jardine. He read much of the current literature of the day. Biographies that told of the spreading of the gospel became his favorite books.

Nasmith came to understand that hope for the city would be found in the grace of God. He saw the conditions of the people in the city and the failure of the religious societies or the church to meet their needs. His view included all the cities that the 23 societies were connected with. He realized there were millions of men living ignorant, barbaric, immoral lives in the cities of Christian nations.
Nasmith saw that if these masses of men were to be reached in their degradation and misery, it must be by men who had some common experience of privation and suffering, men who had lived amongst them, or men who had lived under similar circumstances. They were men who knew temptation and how hard it is once fallen to recover. Men who by God’s grace had been lifted out of the horrible pit and miry clay. They had the practical experience of knowing the only remedy, to pluck poor sinners as brands from the burning, and to lead them to know and trust the loving Savior.

Or another group of men who did not share the experience of extreme degradation in habits that led to sin, men that had learned lessons of human weakness and deeply understood the sorrows and suffering of the poor. Men who had received the spirit of Him who ‘Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sickness.’ Like Jesus these men could go about doing good, reaching the consciences and hearts of the sons and daughters of poverty and crime by the power of love.17

David knew what the solution was, but he wondered, how, where when, what method would God use to reach these masses of men. The beginnings of the answers to the great questions in life often come during prayer. When David was 20 years, old he wrote in his journal:

My God and Savior keep me from grieving thy Holy Spirit by my running ahead! Lead me ever to act as in your presence. I put myself in your hands that you will direct my steps. Lead me to see my duty and obey it, lead me to trust in you. Make me what you would have me to be. Increase my faith, all for Christ's sake.18

The Lord had led David step by step, from a bound apprentice with all its misery to Christian friends who “walked the talk” from a baby Christian to being a Sunday school leader. Throughout Christian history it would be hard to find a more excellent Sunday school teacher than David Nasmith. He paid particular attention to some of the older boys, inviting them to his home for breakfast, and formed them into benevolent societies. When those whom he became close to were stationed in other cities, he would write them thoughtful letters. David wrote William Somerville for years:

Dear William! What do you think now of Jesus? I have been visiting three young men who are to be put to death in the front of the jail. We might well say ‘There go David Nasmith and William Somerville, save for the grace of God.’ Such instances make us truly humble to God for his restraining grace.19

The morning meeting, I am happy to say, is becoming more and more interesting. Last time there were sixteen young men, John Sands was the youngest. Four of them have a view to the ministry--two Independents, one Relief and one Episcopalian. It has been proposed to form an association among the young men and I have invited them to breakfast on New Year's Day.

“Dr. Wardlaw addresses the young people at eleven o'clock on New Year’s Day in the Lower Trade Hall. I intend inviting their parents as I did last year. We need to establish a library.”20
The Lord not only led David step by step but also the young men he influenced. They were stationed with their work in other cities all over the world. They formed with David’s encouragement Young Men’s Societies for Religious Improvement and other associations related to them. By the time David was 24 years old, they had formed 70 Young Men’s Societies in the United Kingdom, France, and America. The object was "to bless young men and make them a blessing." Their ages were from 14 to 35. They met regularly under a pious and experienced president for mutual improvement and benevolence. The Bible was their rule. Political discussions were prohibited.

They have been saved from that which was injurious, at a period the most dangerous in the life of man. When his passions are strong and easily led astray. Men have been won to Christ! Their minds fortified in the time of danger they have been rescued! He who was determined to do good, but knew not how has had the way pointed out to him, and been piloted when surrounded by rocks and quicksands.21

In these Associations, talent that lay hid has been brought to light, cultivated and directed. Young men have been won to Christ. Those who were in business, or otherwise were forced to associate with the infidel and licentious youth of their own age or masters of iniquity, have had their minds fortified and in their hour of imminent peril have been preserved or rescued.22

They must reach out to others more needy than themselves to the poor in the back streets, to the slum-dwellers huddled in dingy alleys and filthy courtyards that lay around the docks, bereft of all opportunity to improve themselves.23
5 Seek the Welfare, Peace, and Prosperity of the City

“Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find welfare.” Jeremiah 29:7 RSV “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” Jeremiah 29:7 NIV

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“We proposed that one or more persons be set apart to the work of visiting the poor in their own dwellings.” David Nasmith

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The population of Glasgow in 1826 was about one hundred seventy thousand and growing rapidly. The beginning of the industrial revolution had much of its start there. Trade had been established to the Continent and the West Indies.

Men and women came from the countryside looking for work and better wages. Migrants came from the hills and the glens of the Highlands and from over crowded parts of Ireland. It was not the artisan class, the craftsman or the mechanic but those who could wield a shovel or tend a loom. They were a little wild and shy. They were poorly clothed and for the first time they were aware of how shabby they looked. Still, they were a proud people.

For those who did visit them it was painful to think of them sitting down to a scanty meal, or shivering in the cold because they had no fuel, to think of their children crying for bread.

They are poor, ignorant people. They are not able to get into the places of religious instruction. They either have no money to pay for a seat in public worship or they have no clothes that they can go out in public if they wanted to.

David knew the value of visiting the poor and he could tell their story. He had looked into their eyes and into their hearts. His plan for the Young Men’s Society members to visit did not work out because they worked long hours and did not have the time.

Some ministers also saw the great need of the poor. They would visit for a while then their other duties would come first. The peace, prosperity, and welfare of the poor of the city would start to take form on January 1, 1826. David wrote:

We proposed that one or more persons be set apart to the work of visiting the poor in their own dwellings, but party feeling ran so high that one said he would give if the agent or missionary was from his denomination. Another said he would do the same if the missionary was from his denomination. Grieved with this narrow, unchristian state of feeling, we were led to consider and suggest the propriety of churches undertaking this work. After due consideration, it was finally agreed that an attempt should be made to commence in Nile-street congregation. Having no desire to narrow the bounds, laws were drawn up to embrace the whole city.
I. That the Society shall be designated, “The Society for promoting the religious interests of the poor of Glasgow and its vicinity, or Glasgow City Mission.”

II. That the object of the Society shall be to promote the spiritual welfare of the poor of this city, and its neighborhood, by employing persons of approved piety; and who are properly qualified to visit the poor in their houses . . . (A complete set of the bylaws -- constitution and rules for the agents can be found in the addendum.)

Six young men of the congregation were selected to raise the money for the support of one missionary, and three older men were selected to superintend him. Before the day of the meeting, a sister church wanted to unite with us so an equal number of their members were appointed to the committee. The meeting was held. Individuals of various denominations were present who at the close, intimated their desire to unite.

Ordinary humanity made it impossible for the agents to stay within the prime purpose of the Society. While being careful not to encourage “rice Christians” the agents gave physical help. The term “rice Christians” meant those who became Christians only because they were hungry. Many times the agents found “physical distress that could be removed and they guided philanthropy.”

The First Annual Meeting was held January 1, 1827, in the Trades' Hall Glassford Street, at noon. The following remarks still speak to mission workers today.

Although this city is highly favored with religious privileges, yet there are thousands who know as little of the Gospel as if it never had been preached in their land. They are living as careless as if they were never to be called to an account. There are thousands of families where the name of God is never mentioned except when taken in vain.

You will convert the houses that were tenanted by men of the foulest passions, into churches of the Redeemer. Where the Lord the Spirit will dwell and the God of salvation will be loved and served. You will arrest the progress of vice and promote the interest of virtue. You will make our poor, our ignorant, and our degraded population stand forth in all that freshness and fairness of moral and of spiritual excellence.

When Jesus left Jerusalem to be crucified, a little band of female friends went with him. Amidst treachery, denial, desertion and malignant persecution, did female fidelity fail? Close behind him they walked and wept in his path. They encircled his cross. They lingered by his tomb. The Lord first revealed himself first to one of their number. They were female disciples. These female disciples who are helping aid the cause of the Redeemer today have my prayer. These female disciples are associated together.

They are a sisterhood voluntarily united by prudent regulation for doing good. In united counsels there is wisdom with each doing a little and all having one object. They are able to achieve a great undertaking. The maxim that is true of this world’s warfare is also true of Christian warfare waged against vice and impiety, ignorance and poverty. “Unite and conquer.” These female disciples are associated in a good cause. They are associated to aid the City Mission. Mr. President, just when I was about to rise to move this resolution of
thanks to the Ladies Association, the following note was put in my hand. “A sale of Ladies’ Work, in behalf of the Society, will take place on the 14.”

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They were Christian men, bound by no other ties than those of the “common faith” and of common object. The City Mission from the first was nondenominational.28

This was something new. A Mission of laymen, not trained in university or theological colleges, but able to proclaim the facts of the Gospel in everyday language...Someone who would go to where they lived, meet them on their own ground, sit to listen as well as to talk, and then explain in words they could understand, the message that was proclaimed from the pulpits of the churches to which the slum-dwellers never went.29

It was the first attempt to bring to bear upon the practical heathenism of our great cities an agency called out from itself, taught and trained in its own schools. Acquainted with all the difficulties of the people. How wise how beneficial the attempt has proved. The experience of that Society has altered the condition of the masses of people everywhere where similar agencies have been adopted. Mr. W. Edwyn Shipton

By the end of the second year there were 13 missionaries and a balance of 600 pounds. The money was contributed chiefly by the efforts of the ladies. Nasmith mailed the plans to principal cities and towns in Scotland, England, Ireland, France, and other places on the continent of Europe, to Asia, to Africa, and to Canada and the United States.
6 She Opens Her Hand to the Poor

“A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels...She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches her hand out to the needy.” Proverbs 31:10&20 RSV

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“I believe the happiest life on earth would be when two pilgrims meet together whose aims are one and they both have the same desire of assisting each other on their journey to heaven.” David Nasmith

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David heard a sermon on marriage when he was 17 and wrote the above words in a letter to one of the young men. With all his heart he wanted a “good wife,” finding one was difficult. When he was 19 David visited a home of a young lady.

While carrying on a conversation with her father, he slipped a note into her hand; “I beg you to reply to a few questions - please trust me. Are you now under promise of marriage?” She whispered, "No, Sir." He wrote another note, "Have you fixed your eye on one whom you desire as your husband? Does that individual know your mind?" Her reply was, "He does not." He put another note in her hand. "Have you any objections to becoming my partner in life? You must give me an answer by tomorrow night." She was surprised and astonished.

The next night they stayed up till 1:00 a.m. and talked of life, the Lord and marriage. David asked her again “Will you marry me?” Her answer was a firm "No." He was crushed and wondered why she had turned him down. Could it be because his father had lost everything and his family had been reduced to nothing? Within God’s time David met Frances the girl he was to marry.

What did Frances Hartridge see in David--a sickly, lowly clerk-secretary for twenty-three societies? Yes, he was a friend with the religious leaders of the city, the powerful, and the wealthy. She may have known that kind of man before, but here was a man, a real man, and one who could win her heart. When David Nasmith walked the city’s slum streets, prostitutes, thieves, and the most wretched of the poor knew him by name. Children who lived in the alleys ran up and grabbed him by the hand. David took the little ones up in his arms as they giggled and laughed. He smelled from picking up the odor of the slums, but Frances Hartridge must have thought, Now there is a man, a man worth marriage, who could be a good father. Sometimes David seemed to be proud and arrogant, but to Frances he was more humble than he appeared. He was bold and courageous, but most of all he loved the Lord and others. The poor of the city seemed to have all of his heart. Was there room for her?

Frances Hartridge was the daughter of Mr. Francis Hartridge, of East Farleigh, Kent. She lived in Glasgow where she “efficiently conducted a respectable business.” She was a straw-hat manufacturer. David and Frances were married in March 1828. He had to wait till he was 29 before he got his “good wife” who was equal to him.
Dr. John Campbell wrote, “Few matches have been more equal and seldom has more
depended on such equality. Frances was truly a helpmate to her husband with a heart as
large and zeal as ardent as David had himself. Her Christian virtue and moral courage did
not fail.”

Frances’s home was full of activity. When people came from other cities or countries to
visit the Institutional House, they often stayed with the Nasmiths. Many of these friends
later became supporters of their work. Young men would come to visit also. For many it was
a home they never had; here they could feel the presence of the Lord. There was good
simple food and laughter around the table:

I heard two anecdotes: First, an infidel Earl had a pious servant, to whom he said one day,
'John, I understand you are becoming one of the religionists; pray, can you tell me how
great is God?' The servant replied, 'Yes, my Lord; he is so great that the heaven of heavens
cannot contain him; and he is so small that he dwells in my heart by faith!' Or, “Did you
hear this one?” A parent said to a child, ‘I will give you an orange if you will tell me where
God is.’ The child replied, 'I will give you two if you will tell me where he is not.”

David’s health continued to decline affecting both his body and his mind. Dr. Moffat said
that the strain of being the secretary for 23 societies at the Institutional house was too
much for him. The Nasmiths agreed that he should resign his position. They believed, it
would be better for David not to be confined but to become a general moral agent doing good
as the Lord might enable him in all ways. First they were “called” to Ireland. David
faithfully wrote in his journal:

The Lord has in great kindness, granted to Mrs. Nasmith safe delivery of a son today at
half past eleven o'clock. The boy is from the Lord, and we give him to be His. May his name
be written in the lamb’s book of life. May it soon appear that he is a vessel to show forth
praises of the Lord and to serve Him on earth! His hair is like his mother’s. He is worthy of
an English mother, Scotch father, and an Irish birth place.

Miss Oswald gave most of the money for their support while they traveled from city to
city. David wrote her from Ireland:

We meet with less opposition than I thought we would. Lee, our first agent sleeps on our
couch. Never have I been more happy than during the last months in our two rooms and
kitchen. Mrs. Nasmith and I are, thanks be to God, of indred spirts and this adds greatly to
my happiness. Thank you for your gift. It is so much better for us not to take money from
these people.

When they came to a city, the Nasmiths looked for the most hurting people, those who
were out of the reach of the church.

Frances was involved in the Sabbath schools and had seen many girls who could no
longer work at the factories turn to prostitution. She opened her heart, home and hands to
those who were poor for whatever reason. David and Frances prayed for an answer to the
question, “How could the girls ‘go and sin no more’ if they had no where to live?” The
following is an example of the practical answer God gave them.
There is not less than 300 girl prostitutes in the town. Several have wanted to abandon their sinful place, but we could find no place for all of them. So we have rented some rooms and hired a woman to minister to them. Many are opposed on the grounds that their cases are hopeless, but we know in whose hands are the hearts of all, and draw our confidence from the Scripture, that we shall not labor in vain. One is a daughter of a minister.34

Frances and David’s aim in life was the same as they assisted each other towards heaven. They were deeply committed to the Lord, each other, their children, and forming societies. Wherever they lived or visited fellowship with “believers” was a main part of their lives. Frances could not get out of the house much because of the baby. Sometimes David stayed home with the little one so she could go to church or be involved in a Sabbath school.

They were poor “pilgrims” as they traveled from city to city. Through it all, David’s happiest and most productive years were after he married Frances. He had found a “jewel” in his beloved “good wife.” They were both ready now to deny themselves and take up the cross of their Savior and follow Him.

The whirlwind of the marriage of David and Frances Nasmith picks up with such speed and touches down at so many different points in the world, it is hard to comprehend.35
7 Take Up Your Cross

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?” Matthew 17:24-26 NIV

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“Yes, beloved Frances, when we have put off this mortal body and meet in heaven. What then shall be our estimate of the light afflictions we now suffer? When we shall see hundreds or thousands, with their palms of victory uniting with the ransomed throng in praising the Lamb. When we are told that these are the fruits of those Missions in Scotland, Ireland, Canada, The United States, or France. That the Divine Redeemer Told David Nasmith, ‘To take up his cross go and establish.’”

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A few years ago one of the city missionaries of the Cape Town City Mission and I stood high above the rocky point of the southern tip of Africa. The sound of the waves was loud as they crashed violently against the rocks. I yelled to the city missionary “I studied about this place when I was a child in school. My teacher said, ‘Long ago if a ship made it around the cape it was safe.’ I asked the missionary, “What was the town like back then for the poor, the suffering?”

He answered, “I don’t really know. But I do know before there was a town or anything there was a stone cross way up there. The ships would stop and a sailor would climb up there, bury letters at the foot of the cross and pick up any mail that his ship should take.” I started to cry, as I answered back, “That means people knelt at the foot of the cross and buried letters. Some contained Nasmith’s plan for City Missions and some letters contained orders for slaves.”

The cross is the most universal symbol of the Christian faith. The power of the cross is not found on top of a church steeple or a cross around the neck. It is found in those who deny themselves and take up their cross. These are the people who change the city one heart at a time. They compare their suffering to the suffering of Jesus and count it all joy. The Nasmiths had learned how to do that. They were willing to deny themselves the comforts and security of daily life, and follow in the steps of Jesus.

God had given Frances and David a passion for the cities of America. They were well aware of the damage city life could do to people and they were concerned for the new cities. Their desire was to go to Canada and the United States to “sound the alarm.” Miss Oswald gave them some money for the trip, but it was not enough so they sold their furniture. They set sail from Greenock on July 27 aboard the Osprey bound for New York. When they arrived, David wrote Miss Oswald:

Our landlady is so haughty she makes us uncomfortable. Sitting at a table with 14 to 16 strangers was new to us and for sometime was not much relished. Next week we will move
to a boarding house kept by a woman who is said to be religious that only cost $7 a week. It is not so pleasant or healthy as where we are now, but I trust we will be comfortable.\textsuperscript{37}

The Nasmiths enjoyed long talks together about how the Lord had led them before and after their marriage. Their times of reading the Bible and singing hymns together was wonderful. The two had become one. They were able to pray together about deep feelings and desires. They made a prayer list:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Pray for revival in our own souls
  \item That our love and devotedness to Christ might be greatly increased
  \item Pray for the church.
  \item Pray that the Lord will smile upon City Missions and
  \item Provide people to help.
  \item Pray that the Lord will bless all our relations
  \item in England and Scotland.
  \item Return thanks for past mercies.
  \item Dedicate ourselves afresh to the service of God.
  \item Seek wisdom to direct and grace to be faithful.
  \item Pray that the Lord will favor us to be the humble instruments
  \item Of great good, in promoting extensively the glorious Gospel
  \item By forming many missions in cities, towns and villages\textsuperscript{38}
\end{itemize}

David had developed a plan that worked for doing good by forming a variety of societies and associations. First, he would get his family settled if they were with him. Second, he would visit the people he knew and get other names of people that might help with his cause and visit them. Third, he would visit the poor and suffering wherever they were. Last, when he thought the time was right, he would call for a meeting:

\begin{quote}
Give him twelve persons of either sex, of sense and piety, around a table, or in a chapel vestry, and let him talk to them on the condition of their city and town population, and the adaptation of his Missions to meet the necessities of the cause, and the chances are as a hundred to one that the whole company would embrace his views, and from that hour become his zealous associates. So deeply was his heart set on the enterprise that his power of persuasion was wholly irresistible.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

The Nasmiths traveled Canada and the United States in 1830-1831.

In Canada he formed sixteen societies. In the States he has been instrumental in forming sixteen City Missions, the American Young Men’s Society, and eight or ten auxiliaries to it. He formed several associations in behalf of colored people and also various benevolent associations for the supplying the temporal wants of the poor.\textsuperscript{40}

For each one of these societies or associations there is a story that proclaims a truth found in the spiritual, “He Holds the Whole World in His Hands.” When the hand of God brought David and West Indian Mary Watt together in Glasgow, their friendship impacted the slaves in America. We need to take a closer look at their relationship.

The rule of the day required people to pay a “pew charge” to sit in church. She sat with David for years and he paid the fee. Mary Watt was called the “Happy Negress.” Nasmith
paid for school lessons so she could learn to read the Bible. She attended all of his classes and memorized large passages of scripture. She took his church doctrine class and was an excellent student. What she did for David and the cause of Christ was to become his close friend.

Through Mary’s eyes David could see and feel some of the pain and sorrow of slavery. He could see one of God’s children that could learn as well as anyone else. She could understand the scripture and he could learn from her.

Nasmith came to deeply believe that people of her race could and should rise up beyond what the world called their “class” or “station in life.” When David came to America, he proclaimed, “Slavery is a curse on this land.” Practical religion not only proclaims, it requires action. He therefore formed associations “for the advancement of colored people,” long before war or laws did away with slavery in America.

David’s “call” in 1830-31 was “to sound the alarm.” His name did not appear on documents when he originated hundreds of associations and societies. Some began even before 1826 through the many letters he wrote. Dr. John Campbell in 1844 asked the question, “Who can estimate the moral influence Nasmith left in Canada and the United States and the results which may flow from it for centuries to come?”

Nasmiths had a large part in: First, a “heart thing” called charity, true love in action meeting physical and spiritual needs. Second, He united evangelical Christians from different denominations on behalf of the poor. Third, changed lives pulled out of the “horrible pit” changed the city. In cities or countries where Nasmith’s vision began to fade God provided others to build on his foundation. In the United States it was Jerry and Maria McAuley founder of America’s Rescue Missions and Mrs. Whitimore founder of the IUGM now the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions.
8 I Can Do All Things Through Christ

“I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” Philippians 4:12-13 KJV “I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” Philippians 4:12-13 NIV

“...through Christ strengthening me I can do all things.' Yes I can and I will trust him for all that is to come. As for the past the past shows he is a faithful God.” David Nasmith

Before they left Montreal, Canada, David became concerned for the health and comfort of his wife. He gave her the choice of which city they should live in, New York City, Paris, or London. She chose London. They had to wait for years before they could move the family to London. Finally Miss Harriet Read from Ireland gave a large amount of money and formed a support group for the London cause. David had been traveling on the continent and wrote his wife:

Perfection is not to be found either in David or Frances Nasmith; of this I am very certain. For a time, we have been deprived of our good furniture and our settled home. We have been as pilgrims and strangers on the earth. The time is drawing near when we shall see fewer grounds than we now do.

David and his family arrived in London in 1835. Their plan to start a London City Mission to all but himself and his wife seemed hopeless if not preposterous. Rev. B. W. Noel wrote him:

I very much fear that in the present circumstances of the Church, you will find yourself repelled at every step in any plan which contemplates the co-operation of different denominations. In the first case you must secure the consent of the Bishop, or you will not get the clergy to act, and without the clergy you will find it hard to move the lay members of the establishment. In the second place, there is a wide gulf just now between Dissenters and the Establishment.

However, in God's great plan the need of a City Mission was put before the people of London. A prominent man wrote a letter to the Bishop of London, which the “Times” newspaper published:

There are hundreds of thousands of people in the rat-ridden, crumbling old buildings behind the streets of the wealthy in his Lordship's diocese. There is something unspeakably painful to realize that this mass of immortal beings, living so close to
themselves, are without God and without hope. There are 500,000 Sabbath-breakers, 20,000 are addicted to beggary, 30,000 living by theft and fraud, 32,000 picked up a year off the streets drunk, 100,000 habitual gin drinkers, 100,000 or more have yielded themselves to systematic and abandoned profligacy (licitiousness).

In the Nasmith’s little home, on May 16, 1835 Richard Edward Dear and William Bullock met with David. It was recorded, “After prayer we formed the London City Mission, adopted our constitution, assigned offices to each other. After laying the infant mission before the Lord, desiring that he would nurse and bless it, and make it a blessing to tens of thousands, we adjourned.”

Thomas E. Buxton, M.P. was well known because he had given speeches on the floor of Parliament pleading for the emancipation of the slaves. He agreed to be the treasurer of the London City Mission and contributions started flowing in. In six months the mission had 10 agents and 12 months 40 agents visiting the people in the slums.

The London City Mission established its headquarters in Red Lion Square. The committee observed with some surprise that David had formed a number of other societies and associations in their headquarters. Among them the Young Men’s Association and the Adult School Society.

People criticized Nasmith for not staying focused on the London City Mission. Donations started to slow down. Some also complained that there was not a balance of laymen from the Dissenters and the Church of England on the committee. David upset donors more by forming yet another society.

A rescue mission for prostitutes, called the Female Friend Society. Its premises adjoined the London City Mission offices - and were connected to them by a door for convenience of administration! The committee was horrified! This indelicate and imprudent action, one of them called it, and one after another the most important members resigned.44

Nasmith was not salaried by the London City Mission. He committed no breach of trust, or of duty. David came to London not only as a founder of a particular mission, but in his words “As a General Moral Agent, bent on doing good in all possible ways, by all practicable means.” He did in London what he tried to do everywhere.

Goodwin wrote in, “The Dictionary of National Biography”:

David Nasmith originator of town and city missions... In 1835 he accepted the secretariaship of the Continental Society in London. There he organized the London City Mission, with the assistance of Sir Thomas Buxton, the Philanthropic Institution House, Young Men’s Society, the Adult School Society, the Metropolitan Monthly Tract Society and finally the London Female Mission. In March 1837 he resigned his office as gratuitous secretary of the London City Mission, and with a few friends he formed, on March 16, the British and Foreign Mission, for the purposes of corresponding with the city and town missions already in existence and of planting new ones.
“If the people don’t come to Church the Church must go to the people!” Following this motto, Adolf Stocker started the City Mission in Berlin last century. This motto has not changed to this day. People shall acknowledge that Jesus Christ is their Lord and receive help in cases of distress and need. It is the task to bring the Gospel as a testimony in word and deed into crowded urban areas marked by mobility, anonymity, liberality, morbidity and temptations of many kinds. The city Missions want to be cells where people can come to right again. The work with its elements of mission, pastoral care and diaconia is done for and with local congregations... The “Word of the Day”, known as “Telebible” is taken up by an increasing number of City Missions. The classical services, such as resocialization of delinquents, rehabilitation of persons at risk and prostitutes, help for drug addicts, help for psychiatric patients, rehabilitation of the homeless and men and women at risk, help for the physically, mentally and sensory disabled help for the aged etc. have been continually performed...”

City Mission World Association conference 1997

“I can do all things through Christ” is just a little Bible verse but it is powerful. Down through the centuries city missionaries have found strength in it. Steve and I were in India while religious riots were going on between the Muslims and the Hindus. The city missionaries continued to hold open-air meetings and work with the masses of people in the slums and train stations. I asked one of the missionaries, “Don’t you get hit out there?” He looked at me like I was from another planet and answered, “Of course sister!”

We made our way up the stairs and into the apartment of the mission’s director. It was a small place and it was the “office” of the mission. On the side of the mission’s filling cabinet was a little sign that read, “I can do all things through Christ.”
9 Death, Where Is Your Sting

“Where, O death is your victory? Where O death is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” I Corinthians 15:55-58 NIV

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“I desire to find the right path, and walk in it, by night, in sunshine and cloud, in storm and calm. The Lord being my helper, I go on. I know it is all in love. I am in my Father’s hands.” David Nasmith

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Immediately after resigning from the London City Mission David and a few friends formed the British and Foreign Mission Society. He worked to fulfill the following purpose of that society:

Correspondence with all existing city and town missions, and planting new ones where they do not exist, to the extent of our ability and by such other means as Divine Providence may point out, to do good to the souls and bodies of mankind.46

God had blessed David and Frances with five children. They gave him joy and filled his heart with love. From the time David became a “believer” he made a list of his goals on New Years day. On January 1, 1839, he wrote:

Aim this year

At eminent holiness, humility and usefulness
At the conversion of all my children
At the promotion of love, union and action in the body of Christ
At the formation of a universal itinerary library
At the establishment of a loan fund for the industrious poor
Religious tracts and outpouring of the Holy Spirit
Form 20 City Missions, 30 Young Men's Societies
Form Maternal Societies Family Missions Female Missions
The Lord being my helper, I go on.47

David was off and traveling again and as always Frances was home praying for him and their “cause.” He wrote to Frances, whose tender spirit had been hurt by those who were critical of him:

Give yourself no concern or uneasiness . . . Friday, when you, the brothers and sisters were meeting in prayer for us was the same time the Birmingham Town Mission was formed. Yesterday, 20 ladies formed themselves into a Ladies Branch to aid the mission.48
Miss Harriet Read had committed to raise the money for Nasmith's support. Most people would not give unless David would only do City Mission work. He keeps on going. One time he wrote to Frances “I have given all my money to the poor and it will be a while before I can come home.” After one trip he returned to London having formed 70 Societies.

The Nasmith's had five children and were facing starvation and bankruptcy. He knew that in a short time, if individuals did not give, he would have to find employment. The following letters to his wife show that she was the only person who could have stopped him.

Do my dear always say to me what you think as to what is right and proper. Your kind and faithful counsel I value much. To be absent from you is by no means desirable. You only have to say, ‘come home’ and I will do it, ‘stay at home’ and I will do it. This I will do only on this ground that you are the partner of my life, the mother of my children, tenderly and dearly beloved on many grounds.49

Let us, beloved, live for eternity and live for Jesus who died for us. I think I hear our Lord say to us, ‘Fear not, be faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.’ Difficulties and darkness may continue for a season, but an hour of deliverance will come. Yes it will. Be patient. Be of good courage. He will strengthen thee, yes he will uphold thee! 50

Frances needed that courage and strength for the next part of David’s life. In her words:

Weeks before my dear husband's departure, it was evident to me and others that his accustomed energy of body and mind were sinking. He labored under a depression of spirits, which was quite unusual for him. He called me to his room to unite in prayer with him and begged to know the will of God. One day he said, ‘my dear a little trip would do me good. You know last month no society was formed by the British and Foreign Mission.’ After he left, a feeling of anxiety filled my mind. I went to my room and asked the Lord to help me.

David got off the train with a good deal of energy and spirit. He apparently looked like he was in good health, as he told the object of his trip, the formation of a City Mission. As he was walking, he complained of a pain that was so excessive he doubled over. He was taken into a home and then to an Inn by carriage. A surgeon came, and David said ‘I know it is all in love. I am in my Father’s hands.’ Mr. Percy then said, ‘It is hard to say, the Lord's will be done.’ David replied with much energy, ‘Not at all.’ The disease was rapid and extensive. His hands and feet began to feel cold. The doctors applied 24 leeches to his stomach, then a hot poultice and hot water to his feet. Another medical friend came but he said ‘there is no hope.’ David laid still in the bed for a while and said, ‘I am ready to go whenever my Master calls me. ’He has been a good Master. There is nothing like being employed in his service. I want you to have a City Mission here.’ They moistened his lips and he asked, ‘Will you meet me in heaven?’ He laid with much composure and without pain.51

Frances continued, "they came to get me, but it was too late when I arrived. I was never to hear his voice again, for his happy spirit had gone to Jesus.”
David's body was brought to London and placed into the Wesleyan Chapel. After the service his body was carried across the road to Bunhill Fields. The 15th chapter of I Corinthians was read while the people sang:

Christians and brethren ere we part

Join every voice and every heart
One solemn song to God we raise
One final hymn of grateful praise

David Nasmith died in 1839. He was only 40 years old. He left Frances a poor widow with five children. The eleven years he was married, were the happiest and most productive years of his life. When he wrote this letter to his wife, he was telling of their future in heaven. Today the following words are reality.

Yes, beloved Frances, when we have put off this mortal body and meet in heaven. What then shall be our estimate of the light afflictions we now suffer? When we shall see hundreds or thousands, with their palms of victory. Uniting with the ransomed throng in praising the Lamb. When we are told that these are the fruits of those Missions.... That the Divine Redeemer Told David Nasmith, ‘to take up his cross and go and establish.”
“His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: “What have you done?” Daniel 4:34-35 NIV

By the year 1837, David Nasmith had been instrumental in the founding of over 60 City and Town Missions. It was April 25, 1837 that he met with local Christian leaders in Manchester England to found the Manchester City Mission. The record of that founding from the book “Ten Fruitful Decades” helps us to see the method used.

David first met with a small group of leaders in 1836 and laid out the plan. Then he returned and attended the formal meeting to form the mission. Then a public meeting was held. The Manchester Guardian gave the following report on May 3, 1837 after running ads declaring the public meeting:

The Chairman then addressed the meeting . . . And called on Mr. Nasmith to state his views...He said, ‘That if we expected the poor to flood to our churches, we were greatly mistaken, and if we wanted our places of worship to be crowded, we must carry the Gospel to the homes of the poor. The object of the mission is not to make people Protestants or Roman Catholics, Baptist, Episcopalians, Methodist or any other sect: its object was in no way sectarian, but to unite all denominations of Christians, and by one strong effort, to pluck sinners as brands from the burning.

One agent was hired for every 400 families. He was instructed to visit each family once a month and establish three religious meetings weekly in three different parts of the area he was working.

Over every 20 agents there was a general superintendent. “A man capable of entering fully into the merits of the mission. Who would continually overlook the agents and see that their work was satisfactorily done.” It was estimated that there were over 30,000 unchurched families in Manchester, so the vision was quite a challenge. David Nasmith shared his vision and his plan with anyone who would listen.

God’s hand is at work today in City Missions, in the hearts of the servants and in the hearts of those they serve. It is a “heart thing” just like it was for Nasmith. The love of God, our love for God and our love for our neighbors is what “overcomes evil with good”. It would take volumes of books to record all the programs that missions provide today. The Lord continues to do great things from generation to generation.

Many City Missions would not claim Nasmith as their founder and yet there is a Nasmith connection. For example a story I heard from one city missionary: “Over one hundred years ago there was devastating poverty in Stockholm, Sweden. Matilda went door to door with, the gospel and the hot potatoes. She told her pastor the conditions of the poor in the worst slums. His heart was touched but he did not know what to do. He visited another city that had a City Mission, came home and founded the Stockholm City Mission.
The mission and its message impacted the city for good to such a degree that school children today learn about the pastor.”

Nasmith has shaped Basic City Mission values through generations. Charles Chambers wrote in Coming Together “In July 1862, a public meeting resolved to establish a Sydney City Mission based upon the London City Mission with which Mr. Short had had contact before coming to Australia. The movement spread to most Australian capital cities during the latter part of the century.”

In America the city missionary John Little impacted the lives of Jerry and Maria McAuley founders of the American Rescue Mission movement in the 1800s. Little lived with a “seasoned missionary couple” and had been trained in the Nasmith system of visiting agents. The City Mission movement continues to flow from God’s heart to individuals producing the fruit of practical religion It is God’s love in action changing the heart of the city one heart at a time.
Addendum

David Nasmith and the YMCA

In doing research on David Nasmith his name is often mentioned in relation to The Young Men’s Christian Association. David formed hundreds of societies and associations but believed that Christians in their own cities should take responsibility for them. His was only to help them form not take control. Towards the end of his life his hearts passion was for City Missions and he had pleaded for someone to take up the cause of the young men.

An old drawing of a mission in New York City shows the YMCA and City Mission together in the same building. That is how Nasmith intended it to be his vision and involvement is evident in the founding of the London YMCA as stated in:


The History Of the Young Men’s Christian Association of London

The year 1835 has become memorable in the history of religious work, by the formation of the London City Mission. Its founder, David Nasmith, had, during many years of evangelistic labours, made himself acquainted with the conditions of the people in our great cities, with the failure of ordinary religious agencies to meet their wants, and with the utter inadequacy of such agencies, were they ever so well adapted to such an end, to supply the clamant needs of millions of men who were then living in this Christian land in a degree of ignorance and barbarism which only differed from that of heathenism, in that its moral evil and danger were intensified by the light and privilege amid which it had grown and extended.

Mr. Nasmith saw that if these masses of men were to be reached in their degradation and misery, it must be by men who had some common experience of privation and suffering; men who had lived amongst them, or had lived under similar circumstances; men who knew how easily the border line of industry and integrity is passed under the influence of temptation, and how hard it is for men once fallen to recover themselves in this land of respectability; men who, by God’s grace, had been lifted up out of the horrible pit and miry clay, and who could go with the strong sympathies of a common woe, and the practical experience of the only remedy, to pluck poor sinners as brands from the burning, and to lead them to know and trust a loving... Saviour; or men who, if they did not share the experience of extreme degradation in the habits and consequences of sin, had learned such lessons of human weakness, been so deeply penetrated with the sorrows and sufferings of the poor, and acquired so much of the spirit of Him who “Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses,” that they could, like Him, go about doing good, reaching the consciences and hearts of the sons and daughters of poverty and crime by the power of tenderness and love.
It was the first attempt to bring to bear upon the practical heathenism of our great cities an agency called out from itself, taught and trained in its own schools, master of all positions, and acquainted with all the difficulties of its subjects. How wise, and how beneficial the attempt has proved, the subsequent experience of that Society, and the altered condition of the masses of our people everywhere, where similar agencies have been adopted, will attest. But the farseeing intelligence, which comprehended the danger to society from the condition of the poor, and devised this plan to meet the remedy it, had also discerned the evils which were likely to result from the practical separation of the young men of the population from the influences of religion.

Infidelity was noisy and active; many of the leading advocates of an improved system of National Education were unfavorably disposed towards, if not opponents of, Christianity; the political strife which had aroused the masses of the people at this juncture to the verge of rebellion had found their way into houses of business also. In several large establishments combinations were attempted, with the view of coercing the principals in their arrangements. There were many exhibitions amongst these young men of lawlessness of disposition, while the ordinary temptations to selfishness, self-indulgence, and vice were unchecked by any adequate influences either social or religious... The question presented itself to Mr. Nasmith. How are these young men to be met and dealt with? If they go wrong, all goes wrong; for they are everywhere the doers, whether the thing done be good or evil.

The principle adopted in the case of the general population furnished a reply in regard to this particular class. Young men who have seen and escaped from these temptations; young men who have learned to love and study their Bibles; young men who in the sense of personal guilt and weakness, have sought pardon and strength from the Lord Jesus Christ, and are seeking to live as his disciples in the world, must be the instruments employed to reclaim, protect, and bless their fellow young men.

On the evening of the day on which the London City Mission was instituted, there assembled with Mr. Nasmith, in the house of Mr. George Sceley, in Fleet Street, a party of young men, who united to form the Metropolitan Young Men's Society, of which the Hon. and Rev. B. W. Noel, then minister of St. John's, Bedford Row, became president; and amongst the vice-presidents were to be found those who bore the loved and honoured names of William Hamilton, one of the elders of Regent Square Church; James Nesbit, of Berners Street; and William Whitmore, of the Bank of England. Its weekly meetings were continued for some time, but it was social in its character, and did not lead to any aggressive action on behalf of young men; and with increasing years and domestic and commercial responsibilities of its members, it passed away. Not, however, before it had done its work by calling attention to the necessities of young men; and leading to the formation of other Societies for their benefit in other places.

Of these amongst the most influential were the London Young Men's Society, under the presidency of the late Rev. Dr. Alexander Fletcher, meeting in Finsbury, and one at Hackney, of which the late learned and excellent Rev. F. A. Cox, D. D. was the representative. By such instrumentalities young men were brought under public notice, and their dangers and their wants kept before the eye of the Church of Christ, until in 1844, an effort was made to grapple with the subject in the formation of our own Young Men's Christian Association.
The History of the Young Men’s Christian Association is a Story of Grace, a memorial of God’s saving mercy to lost and helpless souls. As such its perusal will call forth the thanksgiving of many Christian hearts, but chiefly of those who, having known the struggles, temptations, and snares of “life in great cities,” will understand the value of an association, which seeks to promote “the spiritual and mental welfare of young men.” Mr. W. Edwyn Shipton, pages xxi, xxii, xxiii, xxiv, lvi, [Edited]

2. 1851-1901 Historical Sketch of the Young Men’s Christian Association of Montreal (Montreal: 1901).

The organization of the first Young Men’s Christian Association on this continent owes it origin to the Christian earnestness and zeal of a few young men who had been members of the Young Men’s Society founded by David Nasmith of Glasgow. It was difficult to obtain a suitable missionary, and in June 1853 Mr. W. Greenfield was secured. In October 1853 the Manchester City Mission sent out Mr. Samuel Massey. In 1854 the Association was separated from the city mission. pages 1, 3, 4, [Edited]


A few stalwarts continued the program of tract distribution and rescue mission work through the 1840’s and one survivor passed the torch to the founders of the Montreal YMCA whose first program, with its Waterfront Mission, very much resembled that of the Nasmith society. In his Historical Sketch of the YMCA McBurney wrote in 1884 that in Morse the Associations of America were realizing the dream of Nasmith. page 20, 123 [Edited]
First City Mission Annual Report

The First Annual Meeting was held January 1, 1827 in the Trades’ Hall Glassford-street, at noon. President William M’Gavin, Vice Presidents Wm. Cunninghame and John C. Colquhoun, Treasurer Thomas Duncan Secretaries Wm. Moffat and Hugh Barclay

LAWS

I. That the Society shall be designated, “The Society for promoting the religious interests of the poor of Glasgow and its vicinity, or “Glasgow City Mission.”

II. That the object of the Society shall be, to promote the spiritual welfare of the poor of this city, and its neighborhood, by employing persons of approved piety; and who are properly qualified to visit the poor in their own houses for the purpose of religious discourse; and to use other means for diffusing; and increasing amongst them; a knowledge of evangelical truth.

III. That the business of the Society shall be conducted as follows: by a President; Vice-President; twenty-four or more Directors; and two committees on funds, the one consisting of twenty-four males and the other of twenty-four females; a Treasurer; and two Secretaries; to be chosen annually by the Society.

IV. That the Office-Bearers and Directors alone shall have the choice, appointment, superintendence, and control of the persons to be employed in effecting the object of the Society. Any five to be a quorum.

V. That the committees on funds shall use all proper means for procuring the supplies of money necessary for carrying on the Society’s operations . . .

VI. That the Committees on funds shall each meet by themselves; that the members of the male Committee shall pay over the monies collected by them to the Treasurer; that the female committee shall appoint one of their own number to be treasure to themselves, who shall pay over to the Treasure of the Society the monies collected by them: and that each of these committees shall appoint one of their own number to be a Secretary to themselves . . .

VII. That the Secretaries shall attend all meetings of the Society and Directors, and shall record their whole proceedings in a Sederunt Book, to be kept for that purpose.

VIII. That the whole other business of the Society shall be managed by the President, Vice President, Directors, Treasure, and Secretaries.

IX. That the stated meetings of the Directors shall be held monthly; and of the male and female Committees on funds quarterly, in the months of March, June, September, and December; and that the Public Meeting of the Society shall be held annually, on the first lawful day of January, when the proceedings of the Committee shall be reported, and other business transacted.

X. That any individual subscribing five shillings annually, shall be a member of the Society.

Although this city is highly favored with religious privileges yet there are thousands who know as little of the Gospel as if it never had been preached in their land. They are living as careless as if they were never to be called to an account. There are thousands of families where the name of God is never mentioned except when taken in vain.

You will convert the houses that were tenant ed by men of the foulest passions, into churches of the Redeemer. Where the Lord the Spirit will dwell and the God of salvation
will be loved and served. You will arrest the progress of vice and promote the interest of virtue. You will make our poor, our ignorant, our degraded population stand forth in all that freshness and fairness of moral and of spiritual excellence.

[Edited]
AGENTS (City Missionaries)

1. The Agents of this Society be chosen from all Evangelical denominations of professing Christians. That they be men of a proved piety, prudence, and zeal, and that such as are preachers are preferred. (The first set of Laws only stipulated “approved piety”)

2. The Committee shall apply to the different bodies of Christians, so as to secure a proportion from each. However if a properly qualified Agent offers himself, the committee may accept his service even though there is an adequate number from his denomination already providing there is funds.

3. The persons wishing to be employed by the Society shall make application in writing.

4. The Agents shall be engaged three months on trial. If approved continue in the service of the Society so long as circumstances shall render it expedient.

5. No Agent shall be required to act contrary to the laws prescribed to him by his denomination.

6. The Agents shall occupy themselves about five hours a day including Sabbath in the service of the Society. Saturday shall be for study. The Agents shall visit between eleven o’clock in the morning to nine o’clock in the evening, because of the convenience of the people. No calls to be made during dinner hour.

7. In the meetings held with the poor, the Holy Scriptures alone shall be the foundation of remarks made, or exhortations delivered.

8. The Agents shall make it their business to find Sabbath Schools in their districts and direct the children of the poor to attend them; and be able to give information of schools that have a low fee; and to inform those who do not have a Bible how to obtain one.

9. The Agents shall be assigned to the districts and neighborhoods known to be most inhabited by the poor.

10. That it be recommended to the Agents that they meet among themselves at stated periods for prayer and mutual conference.

11. Preaching stations shall be appointed in districts visited by the Agents, to which the poor shall be invited. The co-operation of ordained ministers and preachers of the Gospel, be solicited to maintain worship in these stations, or in other districts of the town or neighborhood as may be deemed proper.
INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN TO THE AGENTS

1. You will inquire after and visit the families and individuals. Make it your first effort to secure their confidence, by convincing them that you have no other object of but to promote their welfare. State to them in an easy and affectionate manner the object of your visit.

2. You will endeavor to get into conversation with them on religious subjects. Gently and tenderly lead their attention to the concerns of their souls. When it may appear convenient read a portion of the Scriptures and offer plain and practical remarks, as you may consider suitable. Endeavor to impress upon their minds the value of the Holy Scriptures as a message of mercy to sinful man. As occasion may require, point out to them their duties in life. Faithfully but prudently reprove open vice when you see it manifested.

Let particular attention be paid to the young, the aged and the sick. Direct the young to Sabbath Schools. Avoid encroaching upon the necessary occupations of the families you visit. Do not persist in calling upon those who refuse to receive you.

3. Endeavor to obtain a convenient place in the neighborhood where the families you visit can meet one night a week and on the Sabbath. Preach or expound to them a portion of Scriptures in a way suited to their capacities (some of the places they found homes, The old police office, Seaman’s Friend Society chapel).

4. You are not to recommend or avow the interests or peculiarities of any sect or party whatever. Even though you may be attacked avoid making any remarks on the characters or practices of those from whom you may differ. But teach those things, which are calculated to make wise unto salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus.

Study to govern your own temper. Be patient towards all, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves. Become all things to all men that you may gain some.

5. You will keep a regular journal of your proceedings. You will record circumstances and incidents, as you may consider interesting. These journals you will hand in to the Committee upon the Monday before the last Wednesday of every month.
Sources and Abbreviations


Callant = Saint Mungo’s Bells: Or Old Glasgow Stories Rung Out Anew by A. G. Callant (Glasgow: David Bryce & Son, 1888).


King = St. Mungo by Elspeth King (Glasgow: Glasgow Museums & Art Galleries, 1984)


Burger = Women Who Changed the Heart of the City: The Untold Story of the City Rescue Mission Movement Delores Burger (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997).

A Short History = A Short History of Glasgow City Mission for 100 Years (Glasgow: Hulbert Ltd., 1926)


Lee = Ten Fruitful Decades: One Hundred Years of the Manchester City Mission (1837-1937) by Robert Lee (Manchester: Sydney Astle Ltd., 1937).

Notes

1. By Their Fruits You Shall Know Them
   1. Campbell, 84.
   2. Campbell, 31-32.
   4. Thompson, 9.
2. Before You Were Born
   5. Campbell, 246.
3. Despise Not Your Youth
   10. Campbell, 6-7.
   13. Campbell, 47.
4. By the Grace of God
   15. Campbell, 96.
   16. Campbell, 73.
   17. Shipton, XXI.
   18. Campbell, 55.
   19. Campbell, 81.
   20. Campbell, 81-85.
   22. Campbell, 95.
   23. Thompson, 10.
5. Seek the Welfare, Peace, and Prosperity of the City
   25. First Annual Report, 8.
   27. Campbell, 137.
   28. A Short History, 12.
   29. Thompson, 10.
6. She Opens Her Hand to the Poor
   31. Campbell, 90.
   32. Campbell, 196-198.
   33. Campbell, 176-177.
   34. Campbell, 196-200.
7. Take Up Your Cross
   36. Campbell, 293.
   37. Campbell, 208.
   38. Campbell, 198.
   39. Campbell, 442.
“David Nasmith had the zeal of Whitefield, and the wisdom of Wesley,” Dr. John Campbell.

“As a founder of missions, it would be hard to find his equal,” Phyllis Thompson.

“He was a true reformer,” A. G. Callant.

The world that David Nasmith was born into had no more evil or good in it than the world has today. Wars raged across Europe, leaving many homeless and without hope. The struggle between good and evil, between God and the devil within the heart of humanity is as old as creation.

Today, across the world tens of thousands of needy people will be helped by City Missions. Within different cultures, languages, and governments committed Christians provide physical and spiritual help to the most needy. The City Mission movement continues to flow from God’s heart to individuals producing the fruit of practical religion. Changing the heart of the city, one heart at a time.