

Preparing the new worker:
What I would like the sending church (and my pastor) to know...

By
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A church missions committee asked how they could participate in preparation of new missionaries. I suggested the following six areas where new field workers are likely to struggle. To the degree that they can be prepared and equipped for these challenges beforehand, they will have survival techniques that may make a substantial difference in the longevity and vitality of their lives and ministries.

1. Loneliness. Many will experience dimensions of loneliness never before encountered due to distance from family, friends, and all that is familiar. The strangeness of a new culture adds to that loneliness. The skill needed is the ability to make and maintain relationships, first in their own culture, and then have some sense of what is needed to make and keep friends across cultural boundaries.

2. Conflict. Disagreement is bound to happen, and could happen in any and every area of life—boundaries, child care and discipline, use of money, use of time, extent of authority, devotion to work, priorities, etc. Knowing that conflict is inevitable, knowing how to resolve it to the degree possible, knowing how to live with a variety of different opinions, and knowing how to cope when criticized and misunderstood—these are part of handling conflict and surviving.

3. Temptation. The missionary task is one that encroaches on Satan's territory, and he does not want you there! His attacks may be subtle and come in the form of temptation—escape, self-coddling, comparison and excusing, blaming, and extend to more flagrant forms of excess and sin—pornography, dependency relationships, immorality in many forms, substance abuse. Knowing how to maintain purity and focus, how to sustain a close and personal walk with God when the normal forms of spiritual challenge and fellowship are not available—this is essential for the new (and older) missionary.

4. Dryness. Feeling like the spiritual sustenance is being used up, I'm being "sucked dry," I have nothing left to sustain myself, let alone give out to others. This is especially true when separated from customary forms of worship and spiritual nourishment, or when ending a field term, and looking

forward to coming home, but having few stories of success, and nothing new from the Lord. The dry state becomes very apparent to the individual, and appalling. One wonders how long a dry state can go on without doing damage to the worker's soul and spirit, and call.

5. Self-motivation. In most cultures work motivation comes from increased financial reward, “perks” in business, results from hard work, praise and recognition from those we work for. Few of these things are true in the missionary task. The ‘reward’ for hard work is often more work, or more responsibility. It is hard to continue to motivate oneself when there is no tangible reward. It is also hard when living and working far from a supervisor, and the worker has to be his own monitor. Who was it who said, “He who manages himself has a fool for a boss” but many of our workers have to be their own managers. There is the opposite problem too—without a monitor, a person can invest too much time and energy in work, and work to excess, to the exclusion of family responsibilities, self-care, and longevity. Workaholism is probably more prevalent among missionaries than laziness.

6. Spiritual warfare. Evil is blatant and ever-present. Evil is often focused on keeping unbelievers enslaved, and in resisting all attempts to storm Satan's domain. Evil power and oppression can be directed against the missionary, his family, his work, his health, his spirit. The missionary should be aware that the people he lives among are in the kingdom of darkness; they live in fear and believe lies. His message of hope and victory will not be a welcome one. He needs tools for the battle, and must know how to engage in warfare at the level of the supernatural, using the tools provided by God's Word. This is a foreign realm for most new missionaries, one they are seldom prepared for, nor equipped in.

In whatever way the church is able to respond to these six factors, helping to acquaint their new workers, and equip them to engage in preparation in these areas—it will make a difference!

There are skills for each of these areas. There is also a good deal of reading material. And the experience of older, perhaps now retired missionaries can be a source of learning and information and benefit to the new workers.

By whatever means, I hope the church takes these areas of challenge very seriously and addresses them.