

## Five Ways You Can Help Your Missionaries

*Editor's note: The author of, "Five Ways You Can Help Your Missionaries" is himself a missionary in the 10/40 window laboring in a region categorized as hostile to Gospel workers. For the safety of those he is serving, as well as his own family, we cannot share his identity. If you know the author, please do not disclose who they are publicly. Thank you.*

*"Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth." - 3 John 5-8*

If you know a missionary, you know a person who needs help.

The stoic image in our mind of a modern-day Apostle Paul laboring alone in the hinterlands, impervious to fatigue, fear, and depression, is born more of Western pioneer ethic than the Bible.

The actual Apostle Paul had periods of fear and depression (2 Cor. 7:5-6). He spoke highly of the help of others in his various missions (Rom. 16:1).

He was human. Weak at times. Needing help at times. It's the same for your missionaries. If you know a missionary, they need your help.

### Why Your Missionary Needs Help

If you know a missionary currently on a foreign field, they likely went out to the mission field to reach people with the Gospel who would be otherwise unreached in the absence of their efforts. That's the core purpose of missions. Any place or people group that is still largely unreached in 2020 is probably so for good reason: it's hard to do it. There's some degree of suffering involved to reach them.

The Apostle's call to the ministry for Timothy was an invitation to this very thing: "Suffer hardship with *me*, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 2:3). If your missionary didn't bail out on the hard, unreached places for some cushy post in an Evangelical haven, they're going to face hardships.

The lowest hanging fruit on the tree is the first to be picked. If unreached groups were easy to reach, they've likely already been reached. Unreached regions and people groups exist because of several barriers to entry for the Gospel and the missionary. Anyone attempting to go to the unreached in 2020 is going into a hard situation. They will need your help.

## **Some of Their Hardships**

As the opening text indicates, the first hardship your missionary will face is inherent in the missionary call. They went *out* for the sake of the Name. Those who have not heard of Christ are not people within the church. To reach them, you have to go *out* to do it.

Going out could simply mean going out on the streets in your local community, and still staying relatively close to your beloved church community. But for the missionary seeking to reach a truly unreached people group, going out will mean getting on a plane and relocating.

What are they going out from? Their church. Their family. Their community. Their home. Their entire life as they've known it up to that point. And if that missionary is sincerely committed to their field, they are going out without *any* intention of coming back.

When they go out, they are leaving behind something they love. Their life in your church and community ceases. It is as if they died. They don't have an active, involved part of life there any longer, nor can they do so from a distance. Who they were to everyone, what they did in the church before leaving, becomes frozen in time as a fond—but fading—memory.

When they go out, they are embarking on a life of loneliness. As the 20th-century missionary hymn goes: "So send I you to loneliness and longing... Forsaking kin and kindred, friend and dear one..." (*So Send I You*, Margaret Clarkson).

Going out is hard enough, but once the missionary arrives at their new field of labor they have more troubles to add on top of their loneliness!

The Apostle Paul described mission life to the unreached in 2 Corinthians 11:

*"Are they servants of Christ? — I speak as if insane — I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in*

*labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.”*

Paul’s description of his life serving Christ can be divided into two sections. The first is his description of the physical hardships and dangers he faced in his missionary work. The second is his description of the spiritual hardships and pressures he faced from the daily care of the churches. We can see this as external and internal hardships. Your missionary is facing both of these challenges.

There are external hardships your missionary must confront living in a hard to reach place. Unreached people usually live in poorly governed countries with crumbling infrastructure. A larger percentage of your missionary’s energy may be spent on just surviving. Figuring out how to get clean water, how to run a household, how to manage sickness, how to fix a broken car, etc... can all be far more complicated tasks outside of Western society.

There are external dangers your missionary will face that they would not have known back home. Working as a missionary brings inherent risks that can only be avoided by *not* becoming a missionary. Paul’s travels and engagements with non-Christians often put him in danger. Your missionary will have to put themselves in danger in order to reach the unreached, or they will be largely ineffective on the field.

Danger is just part of the calling. Where the author of this article labors, there are active terrorist cells. Some have spied on church meetings with the intent to cause harm. There are always-simmering sectarian tensions that can unexpectedly erupt into violence by machine-gun wielding militias. There are frequent anti-government protests on the streets that can involve burning tires, blockaded roads and wild melees between different groups armed with blunt objects.

Personal dangers increase as well. The author’s daughter was hospitalized with Typhoid at one point (despite having been vaccinated years earlier) and could have died. His other daughter broke her arm after it got stuck in an open, poorly maintained elevator shaft. His car was twice sabotaged by unknown antagonists so that a wheel would come off while driving at speed in order to cause a crash. Thankfully traffic is so bad in this particular country the car was not going fast each time the wheel came off and no one was injured except the vehicle.

The list could go on. These are dangers that would not have been as prevalent in for your missionary if they had stayed off of the mission field. It is just a part of life. But it wears on your missionary.

On top of all that, there is still the daily care of the ministry. Your missionary didn't just go out to learn to survive in a difficult environment. They went to preach the Gospel for the sake of the Name.

Ministry is hard enough in the West. The author of this article had the privilege to pastor a church for four years before entering the mission field. Pastoring is hard work. I appreciate the unglamorous persevering labors of most pastors in the West and don't want to diminish that.

Now imagine having to do something that is already quite hard, but in an environment that is significantly more hostile and unforgiving. It's not easy. Sickness increases. Fatigue from the extra energy required to survive increases. Stress from the surrounding dangers and uncertainties in the country increases.

Imagine preparing your message for that weekend knowing that at any time armed groups could burst in and gun down your congregation. Every time you meet it could be the last time. Maybe it hasn't happened yet, but the dangers are real. And so are the burdens of ministry for your missionary.

Your missionary needs your support because they are doing something that is already hard but in an even harder setting. They went out for the sake of the Name, leaving behind what they love in order to spread abroad God's love. Help them. For when you do, you are also a fellow laborer with them for the truth.

## **How Can You Help Your Missionaries?**

The first thing you will likely think of is giving money to your missionary. Perhaps it is a reflection of the support-raising missions model prevalent in the West that this is usually the first thing that comes to mind. Don't misunderstand me. Missionaries need finances to function. They may be involved in Bible and tract printing. Someone has to pay for the materials. They may be running a church plant with all the attendant expenses. Someone needs to pay the rent and utilities. They may be heavily involved in mercy ministries for needy people groups. Someone needs to help fund food, medicine, and other needs. No matter what area your missionary serves in, they will need money to keep things moving forward.

In many circles of fellowship, the churches in the West get that point well enough. If you are generously supporting one or more missionaries, keep doing so. They need it. This article will

address the financial aspect of missions at the last point. Prior to that, there are four other ways you can help your missionary that goes beyond the financial aspect.

## **1. You Can Help Your Missionaries by Praying For Them**

*“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.” - Colossians 4:2-4*

Paul commanded the church in Colossae to devote themselves to prayer. That indicates a level of regular commitment. It also indicates Paul expected the church to corporately—together as a church—be praying. He also asked them, in the course of their devoted regular church prayer times, to pray for him. Paul was doing the work of a missionary alongside others with him. Here he is asking the church to pray for their mission work. This is a good precedent for us to examine.

If your church supports a missionary in any way, you should also be praying for them. Regularly. As a church body. Simply posting their picture on a prayer board and hoping church members will know to pray for them isn't enough. You should be bringing them up in your prayer meetings. You should be sharing their prayer updates or newsletters with your church so they know what to pray for. You should be encouraging your church to keep praying for your missionaries during private prayer times as well. Devote yourselves to prayer for them.

If you aren't having church prayer meetings, well, that's another issue to deal with. Let's assume your church follows the apostolic injunction in Colossians 4:2 to pray. Your church may then find it helpful to seek to pray for your missionary along the principles Paul sets out. Praying for the specific requests of your missionaries is entirely warranted. However, in addition to that, there are some helpful principles to inform and guide those missionary prayers from these verses.

Paul often faced opposition and hardships. If your missionaries are serving unreached people, they will face their share of opposition and hardship too. But notice Paul isn't asking for prayer to be free from danger. He's not asking for hardships to be removed. His prayer request is not for an easier life.

What does he ask them to pray for? Two things. An open door, and clarity in declaring the truth. Think about that for a moment. Why is your missionary on the field? To live a life of reduced hardship and danger? I hope not, or they're in the wrong calling.

If they went for the right reasons, they went to find an open door to clearly proclaim the truth of the Gospel among people who don't know it. If that's why they went, then let's join them in praying along those lines too!

Your missionary wants the door to be open for the Gospel. They also want help to speak it clearly as they ought to. Don't focus your prayers entirely on alleviating hardship – although sometimes that prayer may be right as hardships can close doors and hinder the Gospel.

Focus your prayers on God opening - and keeping open - the door to the people your missionary wants to reach. Focus your prayers on God helping your missionary speak the truth clearly. Sharing the Gospel in another language, into what is typically a very different cultural context, is not easy. Your missionary needs help. Pray for them.

## **2. Remind Them You Pray For Them and Support Their Labors**

*“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.” - Philippians 1:3-5*

Some missionaries I've met over the years confess that it is terribly easy to feel forgotten by the very churches that sent them in the first place. I suspect others I've met feel this way too, but they are reluctant to say it out of fear of being perceived as complaining about or maligning their churches.

It can stem from the simplest thing. They send an email to their church leadership and hear nothing back for weeks. They send out a prayer update or report and get zero replies to it from those on their mailing list. Turnover in their home church brings in new faces that never met the missionaries in person before. Slowly but steadily the missionary feels like a stranger or a sideshow to their own sending church.

Since becoming a missionary I've realized this phenomenon is quite real. If your missionary went out from your church to some far-off place, this is likely true for them as well. One of the biggest struggles and temptations they face is not giving in to the thought that they've been forgotten. How can you help them avoid this trap?

Paul reminded the church in Philippi he prayed for them. He reminded them he was thankful for what God was doing in and through them. He let them know he hadn't forgotten them. Surely the church there was encouraged knowing Paul continued to lift them up in prayer.

This is a good pattern to adopt for your missionary. You may be a faithful church that prays regularly for your missionaries. You may send your financial support in a timely manner. But a simple reminder to your missionary that you are praying for them, that you haven't forgotten them, can go a long way in clearing up the gathering clouds of loneliness.

A common objection I hear when visiting churches is that people think the missionary is too busy and they don't want you to bother them. The first half of that statement may be correct – they are probably busy! But the second half is not. They want you to “bother” them, to remind them they're prayed for, to let them know they're still a part of the community of churches and not forgotten about.

I have yet to meet a single missionary that is too busy to read a note of encouragement from supporters. Perhaps they may not be able to respond right away. But they'll read it. Your reminder to them that they're not forgotten could be a much-needed ray of sunlight into an otherwise dreary and discouraging week. Remind them!

### **3. Plan a Short-Term Visit to Encourage Your Missionaries**

*“For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more.” – 2 Corinthians 7:5-7*

In 2 Corinthians we see a very human side to the Apostle Paul. He admits that during the trials in Macedonia they were cast down and even depressed. Beset by fears. Surrounded by conflicts. Without earthly rest. What did the churches do when they heard of this?

Well, they didn't contact him and say “Hey brother, you're working yourself too hard and we're afraid you're going to burn out. Time to pack it up and head back to Antioch for an extended furlough. Perhaps these trials are God's way of telling you to just slow it down a bit.” Perhaps that is our inclination at times. But it's not Biblical.

If we take the path of least resistance as the only path ordained in God's providence, we're going to do very little for the Lord in the missions arena. Tempestuous storms and fierce

oppositions are often the handmaids of open doors for the Gospel. Hard roads lay ahead for anyone wanting to advance the Kingdom of Christ into realms of darkness. Paul knew this, and so did those who sent him out.

So what did they do to help? They sent Titus. What was the purpose of Titus going to them? To comfort them in the midst of their affliction and to bear a message of encouragement from the churches that sent him. It worked! Paul, who was depressed, was now comforted by God through the visit of this brother.

Think of missions as a marathon race. Your missionary is the runner. If you've ever run a marathon – or even a half marathon – you know that it always gets hard at a certain point. Runners call this period “the wall” and it is when his or her body most wants to quit. If you see a runner at this point they may look awful. Their glazed eyes staring at the horizon trying to ignore the pain. Their mind and body screaming at them that this is insanity and to just quit.

But the last thing you want to do to a runner when they are in the middle of a race is to encourage them to quit. Why? They started that race fully intending to finish it. They knew that things would get tough on the way to the finish line. You would be encouraging them to go against their purpose for running, and you would only be adding to the existing struggle in their mind that is already strongly tempting them to throw in the towel.

Your missionary is not much different. If they left behind their home, job, dreams, Western life, and church to go to some far-flung mission field they did so knowing it was going to present tremendous challenges. They joined this race knowing it would get hard but also knowing they wanted to press on to the finish line. Nobody starts a race intending to drop out half-way through, including your missionary.

You can help your missionary through the depressing and difficult times by sending a Titus out to encourage them. Send them with your church's message of love and support. Let them know that many are still with them and cheering them on to finish the race they started. Send someone to encourage your missionary!

#### **4. Send Someone Long-Term to Help Your Missionaries**

*“Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.” - 2 Timothy 4:11*

The Apostle Paul typically traveled with a team of helpers as he oversaw the work of advancing God's kingdom. Not all—sometimes not any—of the others on his team were



apostles. But all of them had some usefulness to the work. Some were short-term helpers like Titus. Others stuck with Paul through long periods of his labors, such as Luke.

To fulfill the great commission, we must seek to train, mature, and send out independent missionary overseers to unreached regions. We need leaders in places lacking leadership in order to push forward a Gospel advance. But not only leaders. A leader without a team to lead is not terribly effective on the field.

Paul knew his labors were intended to be part of a broader team. Sometimes he had Luke, or Timothy, or Priscilla and Aquila, to help him. Sometimes he was alone or, as in the verse above, facing a shortage of helpers with only one other person with him.

In those periods of greater need, Paul was not shy about asking for help. Here he asks for Mark to come because Paul thinks he will be useful to him for service. This request does not explicitly indicate a long-term commitment, but it definitely indicates an open-ended one. Mark was to come and help, with no clear end of his service. This is a long-term helper, a type of assistance specifically requested by Paul. Mark is a significant request as well because earlier in Acts 15:37-39 Paul had rejected Mark for service. It seems at this point in 2 Timothy 4:11 Paul perceived Mark had matured and was now ready to be useful for the type of long-term, open-ended commitment Paul had in mind.

Your missionary needs helpers. This does not necessarily mean another full-time missionary overseer. Two or more missionary overseers in the same immediate field can produce unique challenges. You don't want your missionary leadership tripping over each other or producing a redundancy of effort in a small part of the broader mission field.

Your missionary needs helpers like Mark. People that are useful for service, with an open-ended commitment to stay on in the work wherever it is in the world. Churches should seek to produce at scale people that are useful for missions work, even if they may not necessarily be elder-qualified individuals able to oversee an independent work.

These individuals should be acceptable to the missionary. Note that Paul specifically asked for Mark based on his reputation for being useful. Paul didn't just ask for any warm body willing to come. Don't force a long-term helper on your missionary that they don't want or need, just because that helper wants to fulfill some desire to serve on a mission field.

Your missionary may be reluctant to push back on it for fear of damaging their relationship with you. You need to know what they may not want to tell you - the wrong helpers sent out are far worse than no helpers sent out. Talk to your missionary first and see if they know anyone by name that they think will be useful in their immediate missions context.

These individuals should already be doing at home what they intend to do to help on the mission field. If you're sending a young lady out to help expand a children's ministry, but in your home church she is never involved with the children, this is not a good sign. If you're sending a young man out to help as an evangelist or one-on-one discipleship, but in his home church he rarely ever goes out to evangelize or make time to disciple people, this won't do.

Whatever area of service a long-term missionary helper intends to serve in on the mission field, it will typically be ten times more challenging than the same type of ministry back home. If they can't handle it back home or aren't even doing it, they have absolutely no business going into a foreign missions context to attempt the same. The mission field is not the place to learn the basics. That's for the home church context. A long-term helper should serve in their home church first, gain a reputation like Mark for being useful for service, and then go out.

These individuals should also be mature and stable. Whatever you do, don't send a basket case out to your missionaries. Don't send them someone who needs intensive pastoral care. Don't send them a long-term helper whose life is a mess and who constantly struggles with besetting sins. This will only drain the already limited resources on the team and detract from the energy that should be given towards the Gospel advance in the region.

Send them helpers that give, not take, from the team. Send them mature, stable individuals that have some evident foundations of the principles seen in 2 Peter 1:5-9. Send them helpers that display these qualities and are increasing in them. You can then trust they will be useful and fruitful in whatever area they serve. Send them people who can run without stumbling. Send the people that your church will miss because they fill out the service there so effectively.

## 5. Help Your Missionaries Financially

*“For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.” – 3 John 5-8*

These two verses seem to indicate an obligation for churches to support those who go out for the sake of the Name. We “ought” to support them. This support goes well beyond only financial support. But it cannot exclude financial support. The Apostle Paul often thanked various churches for their financial gifts that helped his ministry in various ways. Those who gave became fellow workers for the truth as they helped Paul in his labors. Every church has the opportunity—and responsibility—to do the same for their missionaries.

When a country wages war against another country, it not only costs them the lives of their citizens but the finances of their country as well. War is costly on all ends. Spiritual war—the advancement of the Gospel to unreached and unevangelized people groups around the world—is no less costly. We have to give up people from our churches to go out for the sake of the Name. We also have to give up money and material goods to support those we send. If we are in this war to win, we ought to support those that are fighting.

The topic of missionary giving could generate several more articles on its own. It is not the purpose of this author to attempt an exhaustive coverage of the topic. Instead, this section will conclude with four quick observations from the mission field about giving.

*First*, do not only give money to your missionary and ignore the other helps needed. It is not uncommon for a missionary to be on some automated check service sent out from a church each month, and yet the church is totally uninvolved in the missionary's work. Read the earlier points. Go beyond just giving financially. Giving is necessary. It is needful. But don't think that it's enough by itself.

*Second*, remember that your financial giving can at times be a matter of life and death. Most unreached mission fields lack the social services and safety nets that Western governments provide. The lack of \$500 might mean a person is refused entry to a hospital Emergency Room and they literally die in the parking lot. Don't think that happens? It often does in developing and third world countries where all services are paid upfront, including healthcare.

If your missionary is underfunded, it might mean people under their care may suffer, remain very sick, or even die due to lack of medical treatment, food, shelter, or other basic life necessities. You might want to cut back on missionary giving to spend more on some new church chairs or a fun outing for your youth group, but is that worth the life of a person your missionary serves on the field? While you may not feel the impact of that, your missionary does. Help them to not have to watch people suffer or die in front of them because of a lack of funds.

*Third*, remember that life for a foreigner in a foreign country is often more expensive, not less, than the West. How can that be? Well, if you expect your missionary team to stay reasonably healthy and productive, they can't spend all their time simply surviving like many natives have to do. Life is hard in poorly developed countries. Food, water, and electricity can cost more if you want a sustainable amount. Low-cost food can be of low quality and unhealthy. Low-cost rent homes can be dilapidated and unsuitable for a foreigner—or most anyone else for that matter—to live in. Visas and residencies can be exorbitantly expensive

because you are a Westerner. Everyone from the local shopkeeper to the government bureaucrat sees a Westerner as a financial resource to exploit.

For example, the country that the author serves in requires you to pay twice for most things you need to live. You pay twice for water—once for a meager supply of polluted government tap water and then once more for jugs of potable drinking water. You pay twice for electricity—once for an inconsistent 10-12 hours of government-provided electricity and then once more for another 10-12 hours of diesel-powered generator electricity.

You pay enormous import tariffs and government taxes for items like cars, washing machines, and even dehumidifiers. A used 4x4 compact SUV built-in 2001 (a 19-year-old vehicle as of this writing) in this country can easily cost \$8,000+ USD. The Blue Book value in the States for the same model would be \$3,000 or less. Even living modestly in our region—around the level of most lower/middle-class citizens in a rented flat—has put our family cost of living up to almost double what it was when we lived in the USA.

Don't think your missionary can reasonably survive on a poverty income and still remain effective in their mission field. You want them to do more than just survive. You want them to have the energy to master the language, minister to the people, and see the Gospel advance. In mission fields where the ground is still unbroken and foreign workers are still useful, this point will likely still hold true.

*Finally*, remember that your missionary not only has their expenses to think about but the enormous pressing needs all around them. They will constantly have people coming to them with serious needs. Financially supporting your missionary just enough for them to stay on the field is not enough. They also need extra resources to help those in need that they're trying to reach with the Gospel. Jesus and His 12 disciples carried around a money bag to pull funds from to help the poor. In the same way, your missionary needs additional finances to use judiciously in various areas of need.

Nothing adorns the Gospel better than good works of compassion done in an impoverished region. And yet nothing discredits a missionary more than a refusal—or inability—to help truly needy people that come to them in desperation. The natives won't understand that this missionary simply doesn't have the financial backing of their churches to do it. They'll instead regard the missionary suspiciously as selfish, uncaring, or worse.

It can also create a perception of favoritism if your missionary was able to help one family last month, but this month has no new funds to help a new family with a new need. They won't understand it as a lack of resources, but as some kind of special favor shown to one family and not to them in their own time of need.

Don't put your missionary in that situation. Support can't be bottomless, of course, but understand that your missionary has much more than just their own family expenses to cover on the field. They have multitudes of people looking to them for help in a difficult place. The Lord will provide what is needed, of course, but He often uses those in the churches to do it.

## Conclusion

If your church supports missionaries, they need your help. Send them money. They need it, and probably more of it than you would ever expect. But go beyond just sending money. Pray for them. Send them reminders of prayer. Send them encouragers. Send them useful long-term helpers. Stay involved in their lives and let them know they aren't fighting this war alone. By doing so your church can be a fellow worker in the truth throughout the world.

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*For more resources on missions visit: <https://illbehonest.com/topic/missions>*