

**Information and
Advice for Missionaries
In the Field**

Serving those who serve



This booklet is intended for the guidance of those wishing to serve overseas as missionaries in association with International Mission Project (I.M.P). Background reading, covering the call of the missionary and preparations for departure, can be found in the companion booklet *Information and Advice for Missionaries: The Call*. Both should be read in conjunction with our booklet *An Introduction to International Mission Project*.

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Part 1: Arriving and Living in the Field

Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. (Acts 14:3)

On your arrival in the place of service, there will be many challenges to face. In order to assist you in successfully meeting these, we outline below some of the possible difficulties which may arise, with some suggestions on how to deal with them:

1. The priority

As at all times, maintaining close fellowship with the Lord is needful and will help you to meet the new demands facing you. Study of the Bible is also necessary that you may be thoroughly prepared for the work. There are many study aids available electronically if you have little space for the transport or storage of books. As Scripture instructs us to gather together with others (see Hebrews 10:25), a further need will be to ask the Lord for a place of fellowship, where you will be able to receive as well as give. A local church will also provide the necessary opportunity for you to learn from others far more familiar with the cultural and spiritual environment in which you now find yourself. If there is an I.M.P. missionary already serving in your new country, they will obviously be a further source of fellowship and help.

2. The new culture

Depending on the part of the world to which you have been called, you will meet in varying degree with the unfamiliar and the trying in your new place of service. For example, you may have to adjust to an environment where poverty, poor services and utilities, extreme heat and troublesome insects are the norm; language, of course, may also be an issue. These difficulties may be heightened by the absence of family and friends and an apparent lack of success in the ministry. It is wise in these circumstances to avoid over-reaction and not to make long-term judgements at an early stage, allowing plenty of time to gain a proper perspective on the situation. In the matter of language, it is I.M.P.'s recommendation that you regard the learning of the local language as essential and take lessons with a view to mastering it thoroughly: the long-term benefits this will bring to your ministry and your relationship with the indigenous people are great. Misunderstandings due to lack of cultural knowledge are almost certain to occur; these, however, should not deter you, but rather promote your desire to learn.

3. Communicating

Although it may seem burdensome and possibly repetitive, communicating with your sending church and other supporters needs to become an integral part of your life. Supporters will need to have meaningful contact with you in order to maintain their fellowship with you. We advise that a prayer letter (a single side of A4 paper in length) is sent every six weeks, and as email is the most convenient medium for this, the obtaining of an email account needs to be an early consideration. As a temporary measure you can use Internet cafes, which are now available in many places. It should also be remembered that your service abroad does not absolve you from the responsibility for caring communication with family at home who are not Christians. They will be keen to know of your welfare, and it is good to write with particular attention to those things which will interest them. Here too, email is of great use, but the task should not be neglected if it is not available: letters, postcards, and phone calls can all be used to ensure that family do not feel forgotten.



4. Work and home

Regular employment is not to be regarded as a lesser service for the Lord. Apart from the financial aspect, it can provide a healthy balance in your life by providing the opportunity to contact and make friends with a variety of people and thus avoid the danger of an exclusive occupation with one particular group. It will also help immensely with learning the language and coming to a better understanding of the culture. Depending on the location and circumstances, there may also be an occasion for you to employ local people as cooks, cleaners, gardeners, or security guards. This can be of benefit to you and to them, although due caution needs to be exercised. To help you with employing people, I.M.P. are able to advise on employment contracts.

5. Relationships with co-workers and local believers

On the assumption that you are joining an already established work, there will be a need to relate to fellow workers, often in intense situations. In these circumstances, it is possible for personality clashes to arise and for a new missionary to be tempted to be critical, overconfident, or too independent; the great need of this time will be humility, along with a patient and co-operative spirit. Conflicts can easily occur over personal issues, doctrine, or styles of working, and it is important to remember that the fault may sometimes be yours. This should be very much a time of learning, and readiness to take on even menial tasks. It is also possible for problems to arise with local church elders, who may have an established pattern of working which appears strange or unusual. In this situation it is imperative to speak and act with grace and not to bring disrepute on the ministry of the gospel by assuming and conveying spiritual superiority.

6. Marital and family problems

Conditions on the mission field can put strain on marriages and family life. If difficulties arise in a marriage, very often the problem is common to all and readily resolved with sound advice. In this situation I.M.P. are able to provide experienced counsellors to help. In the case of children, difficulties over education, health or behaviour can be highlighted in the missionary environment; it is best to seek advice sooner rather than later. In the event that more professional help is required on these issues, we are able to advise on where to find it. It is also possible, of course, that a single person may meet someone they wish to marry. I.M.P. recommend in these circumstances that you exercise caution and consult with friends or experienced fellow Christians in the field and at home, especially if the proposed marriage is to a person of another culture or race; a visit home with the person is also advisable. Love can, and does, cross all barriers, but it is safe to seek advice and be patient. There may be a need for health checks as well.



7. Visits and holidays

Pastoral visits from home are beneficial and to be encouraged. Visits from friends can be refreshing but should be kept to a minimum if it appears that your home is starting to become a holiday resort. This is especially true in the first two years, as you can ill afford to be diverted from language and cultural studies. We recommend that you ensure at least three weeks' personal holiday every year.

8. Finances

It does not necessarily demonstrate a lack of faith to address prayerfully the material facts of what your expenditure is likely to be on the mission field and what income you will have to meet it. Common sources of income for missionaries are the net profit from renting the family home, salary or wages from normal employment and, of course, freewill offerings from individuals or your church. Despite these possibilities, missionaries often experience difficulties with finances because of a prevailing assumption that life abroad is inevitably cheaper than at home: this is rarely the case. Furthermore, calculating expenditure before you arrive in a country is never easy, as it can be difficult to determine your requirements in advance because of the unfamiliar situation. Extra expenses may often be incurred. This, for example, may be because of the needs of sick or malnourished adults and children in a local church – needs which cannot be ignored. In addition, your location and environment may entail medical, travel, holiday or vehicle repair costs beyond what you are used to at home. All such things will need to be considered. We therefore suggest that you keep accurate accounts so that you can appraise your income against your expenditure in the first year. It is wise in doing so to distinguish clearly in your accounts between your personal funds and those relating to the work. Honest stewardship is good in itself and may be a valuable and necessary witness to others.

9. Illness

Even those in the best of health can become ill, particularly in the early settling-in period in a foreign country. It may prove helpful to enquire where the doctors, dentists and pharmacies are located (other expats may be able to help with this) and then pay them an introductory visit to check their rates. Though we trust you will not need one, it is worthwhile locating the hospital as well and establishing how its service works. In case of serious health problems that cannot be dealt with where you are living, we suggest that you contact home and the I.M.P. medical director. He can also advise about regular health checks that should be undertaken.





Part 2: Temptations of the Missionary

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Temptations are plainly not the preserve of missionaries, but your calling exposes you to certain temptations which, though 'common to man', may be more severe in the context of overseas service. It is hoped that an awareness of the pitfalls cited below will strengthen you to walk faithfully with the Lord.

1. Frustration

It is easy to become frustrated with the culture and habits of the new country and its people; this can lead to impatience and even anger.

2. Misplaced humour

Humour at the expense of the people you are meant to be serving, which often occurs at expat gatherings, is distasteful and may betray a critical spirit. It can undermine your love for the people, and eventually your ministry.

3. Depression through isolation

Although Adam at first walked alone with the Lord, the creation of Eve and the procreation of the race established a community existence for man (see Genesis 2–4). Regardless of the particular cast of your personality, a sense of community may be lost due to barriers created by cultural and language issues. This isolation can be fertile ground for self-pity and an exaggerated perception of the situation: you may be tempted to say with Elijah, 'I alone am

left' (1 Kings 19:10). The problem of isolation can be relieved by mixing with expats, although many missionaries resolve not to do this because of the worldliness of the expat community.

4. Exclusive relationships

It is, of course, good and necessary to have friends, but it is possible to enter into an inordinately close friendship which is unhealthy and exclusive of others. There are many likely causes for this, including loneliness, homesickness, financial hardship, or even ambition. Such a relationship can develop with someone from the country you are serving in. A sexual relationship is the extreme possibility.

5. Apathy

Tiredness, illness, frustration, and disillusionment with life and ministry: all these things happen and can, unsurprisingly, bring the temptation to apathy. The answer is steadfastness in faith.

6. Self-pity

Self-pity can arise when you are faced with hardship, weariness, misrepresentation or a host of other circumstances. Remember your calling to follow Jesus Himself, who had every reason to be self-pitying in the face of the cross, but 'lifted up his eyes to heaven' (John 17:1) and sought the glory of God.

7. Discouragement, disillusionment, and disappointment

You are almost certain to face temptations and trials in these areas, especially if you are a person with fixed aims and timetables, as life does not follow a predetermined course, in a developed or an undeveloped country. You may feel that success is proof of your ministry and that there are ways in which to achieve. But it is good to remember that you have much to learn from the Lord and that discouragement, disillusionment and disappointment are often the vehicles for the Lord to teach you another 'd': dependency on Him. Joshua was given excellent advice before entering the land of Canaan: 'be strong and very courageous' (Joshua 1:7).

8. Resentment

Resentment can find its roots in, for example, discouragement, disillusionment, financial instability, or the apparent success of another. Missionary wives can sometimes be tempted to resentment if their husband is away fulfilling a seemingly more meaningful ministry.

9. Misuse of time

Before going abroad you may have known an ordered life in the workplace, where your schedule was determined for you. You may now find yourself in a situation where the use of your time is left to your own conscience. This can lead to either overwork or idleness. Try not be driven, but at the same time learn to work diligently through the day, avoiding frivolous pursuits.

10. Negative thoughts of home

Absence from your home country can produce negative thoughts about home in general, and the sending church in particular, which are based on little evidence. The prejudice thus built up in the mind can cause you to seek to protect yourself and so hinder a fullness 'of love and of a sound mind' (2 Timothy 1:7).

11. Guilt

Satan may suggest through the innuendoes of men that you are blameworthy if you, or more particularly your family, fall prey to ill health or other hazards of the mission field. But if you are in the way of the Lord, it is 'God who justifies' (Romans 8:33).

12. Homesickness

Though strictly a trial rather than a temptation, homesickness can give ground for temptation (see paragraph 4, for example). It is such a common experience in all walks of life that it would be strange if missionaries did not experience it when separated from home, family and friends. Age and experience are no bar to it. Some older missionaries, having suffered from the absence of their own children, suffer again over their grandchildren. Sometimes it is the absence of the material aspects of home, such as familiar food, that gives rise to the problem.

Part 3: Long-term Issues

And when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. (Acts 14:27)

The missionary life can always bring fresh challenges, notwithstanding the experience which develops with years. The following are some of the issues which arise, and I.M.P. are able to offer help and guidance in each case:

1. Preparing to return on furlough

A return home may be occasioned by a number of needs such as holiday, renewal of fellowship, the visiting of family, or health checks. I.M.P. recommend that you establish the main purpose for the trip and make arrangements in accordance with it. If, for example, your main need is for rest and recuperation, care needs to be taken to avoid the many calls to visit churches. Even if rest is not the most important issue, it is advisable to ensure that you set aside adequate time for a holiday. The timing of the trip can also be significant. For example, fitting in a conference in the course of your stay may well accomplish a number of different purposes in a short space of time (a list of conferences in the UK is available from I.M.P., if required). The needs of your co-workers and other conditions in the field will also be a consideration. You should in addition be aware that missionaries returning home are vulnerable to reverse culture shock. This is often particularly so on a first furlough, and women tend to suffer most. About every five years you will need to consider taking an extended furlough for refreshment and fellowship, as burnout needs certainly to be avoided. However, it is wise when at home for a long period to ensure your time is appropriately filled in order to guard against possible boredom.

2. Growing in experience

After three to five years, your situation will have altered considerably. With foundations now laid, you will see more clearly the direction in which the Lord is taking your ministry, and your role in a team may be now one of advisor rather than learner, bringing new responsibilities. This, however, may in itself present new challenges, as there may be many different opportunities for ministry presenting themselves. It needs to be your aim to let the Lord direct you into the paths of His choice. A new danger also may arise, as growing confidence can cause a missionary not to walk as wisely as they should, such that ministry becomes more important than the Lord: prayer and watchfulness remain essential.

3. Returning home permanently

There are a variety of reasons for a return home on a more permanent basis, the first and simplest being that the Lord has made clear that your ministry is finished in that particular location. Other possibilities include health difficulties, the education of children, and family problems at home. Whatever the reason for returning, re-entry into your home country may be by no means easy, and help may be required. Everything with which you were once familiar, from the cost of living to the moral climate, may have changed, and may even be a disappointment; daily life for you and your family may prove to be very different in many respects. I.M.P. suggest in this situation that you take advantage of our re-entry service, called GoCom, which provides advice and support to help you to adapt to the new conditions.

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