

TIPS FOR LONGEVITY IN YOUR CALLING

Not everyone is called to long-term missions. But for those who sense this leading, here are seven tips that will help keep you on the field for the long haul.

1. **PASTOR** Find a sending church whose pastor has a big heart for missions. Pastors may be called by God to serve their churches, but some bring a greater passion for missions. You want a senior pastor with a passion for missions, if possible.
2. **HOME TEAM** Form a “Home Team” to keep you thriving, both at home and on the field. This may sound like a pain in the rear to set up, but it can make the difference in your longevity on the field. It will also help keep a cadre of your friends meaningfully involved with you over a period of years. And if a new pastor doesn’t bring the same vision for missions as your current pastor has, or if a new Missions Committee sets different priorities, your Home Team will keep things steady for you. Here are five sub-teams that we suggest you have in place before heading out:
 - a. **Prayer team** – three or four people committed to praying for you regularly. You should then communicate prayer requests to them regularly from the field.
 - b. **Advancement team** – three or four people committed to keeping your name and face on the minds of your church. Time passes quickly and people sometimes forget about their missionaries. This team works to keep you fresh in your sending church.
 - c. **Crisis team** – two or three people who will communicate between you and your church, your family, and your donors, in case of an emergency. They will also work with the Embassy and State Department as needed in a crisis. Be sure they have copies of your passports.
 - d. **Logistics team** – two or three people who will make sure you’re met at the airport when you arrive, assist you during furloughs, R&R, or other Stateside visits. You’ll need a car, a place to stay, initial food in the pantry, and perhaps someone to coach you regarding cultural changes in the U.S., seriously. (Seriously!)
 - e. **Re-entry team** – two people prepared to walk with you for a while when you leave the field permanently. Reasons may be burn-out, illness, aging parents, conflicts with teammates, retirement, emotional problems. This team will prepare themselves to be with you, in meaningful ways, for a few weeks upon your return. (For more information about these teams contact splinter.john@gmail.com).
3. **BANK ACCOUNTS** Set up bank accounts in two different banks – one on the field, and one Stateside:
 - a. Have a credit card from each banking relationship
 - b. Keep cash in both locations
 - c. Only carry one credit card with you at all times
 - d. If you lose one credit card (robbery, burglary, simple loss), you’ll need a backup
 - e. Sometimes cash machines eat credit cards – you’ll need a backup
 - f. Sometimes national crises close banks – you’ll need a backup

4. **NEWSLETTER** Stay in touch with your stakeholders every month. Keep your name on their minds – don't let people forget you. This is critical to your longevity:
 - a. Use a good electronic email source (e.g., Constant Contact, Mail Chimp):
 - b. Send monthly newsletters to keep your name and face in front of your people
 - c. Keep them SHORT – few people will read more than a half-page newsletter
 - d. Tell a STORY with each newsletter – subject matter may be your calling, daily life on the field, family life, prayer concerns, cultural anomalies, spiritual warfare, anything from your life on the field – but SHORT STORIES every time
 - e. THANK them every time for their PARTNERSHIP with you
 - f. Remind them that neither they nor you could have this impact for Christ, without this partnership
 - g. If communication from the field is dangerous or difficult, set up a liaison relationship with one of your “Home Team,” send your stuff to that one person, and have them distribute it electronically to all of your stakeholders
 - h. If you're in a “creative entry” region and you need to be careful about what anyone says to you in letters or electronic correspondence, then use your “Home Team” liaison's mailing address for all correspondence (snail mail and electronic) and have that person “edit” whatever comes to you, re-drafting the correspondence using coded language, e.g”
 - i. Instead of saying “Muslims” say “cousins.”
 - ii. Instead of saying “Christ” or “Jesus,” or “God,” say, “Dad.”
 - iii. Instead of saying “baptize” say, “rained on” or “went swimming”
 - iv. Instead of saying “believer” or “Christian,” say, “brother.”

You can have fun with this, creating crazy code words that only you and your “Home Team” liaison will understand. Abbreviate “missionary” to the letter “m.” When speaking of China, use the term, “big chicken.” When speaking of visiting a village for evangelistic or teaching purposes say, “making a peanut butter run” or something else that makes sense only to your “Home Team” liaison person.

5. **CRISIS PREPARATION** If you're in a region that might possibly have civil unrest, religious persecution or any other reason why you may need to shelter in place or flee, become very familiar with GGF's *Crisis Preparation and Management Manual*. Always have a “Go-Bag” ready to grab and run; always discuss meeting points if separated; always plan multiple escape routes; always train your kids; always keep a full tank of gas in your car; always keep a stash of cash for emergencies; etc. There's a lot to learn in that manual. Study it fer shur!
6. **SPIRITUAL LIFE** Being effective is not a matter of learning the right technique. Your effectiveness on the field will have far more to do with your own walk with Christ, than with any other training you may have. Stay in the Word daily; be on your knees daily; worship regularly. You can only pour out what God pours in; all else is somewhere between fluff and hypocrisy. Practice spiritual disciplines such as mercy,

humility, forgiveness, and servanthood. Strive to become more like Christ in all relationships, in all circumstances.

7. **CONNECT** Missionaries can burn-out due to a combination of stress and isolation. Make sure this doesn't happen to you. Stress is usually a regular feature of field work, especially heavy in the first two years, but isolation need not be:
 - a) Stay connected to your team – even if separated by miles – use electronic communication if necessary.
 - b) Use electronic media for communicating with friends and family back home. *(Use this option sparingly, because you need to drill down on, and identify with, the field rather than relying solely upon emotional support from the States. But an occasional touch from home can be refreshing and uplifting.)*
 - c) Search for other expats living near you who speak English, and get to know them as friends. This could be folks from other agencies, business personnel, whatever. Simply speaking your own language with someone else can be refreshing.
 - d) Work toward building friendships with other indigenous believers, either those you lead to Christ, or other likeminded local folks.

8. **KEEP GROWING** Add new skills, new knowledge, new tools to your personal repertoire so that with each passing year you have increased your capacity to understand and manage life, enter dialogue more broadly and intelligently, and be a more interesting human being. Commit to being a lifetime learner.

9. **STAY FRESH** Avoid burn-out by learning to pace yourself. Keep weekly Sabbaths. Take regular vacations.

10. **PRIORITIZE FAMILY OVER OCCUPATION** In spite of full-time ministry personnel who burn the candle at both ends, work-a-holism is a pathology, not a virtue. God didn't err when he said, *"Those who won't care for their relatives, especially those in their own household, have denied the true faith. Such people are worse than unbelievers." (1 Tim. 5:8 NLT).* The quality of your relationship with your spouse and children will communicate more clearly and with greater volume, than anything you might say to indigenous unbelievers. Being in ministry is a high calling, not a death sentence for family life. Guard your time and quality of relationships with your family.