

Serving As Senders
Your Part in Foreign Mission Work
Lisa Calvin

The following is a summary of the book Serving As Senders by Neal Pirolo.

Introduction

When most people hear the words “missionary” and “support” in the same sentence, the automatic response is to think of financial support. However, financial support is just one of the various kinds of support that Christians of all economic means can give to missionaries. Romans 10:14-15 makes it clear that those who are called to stay have a role in missions just as much as those who go:

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

Support can be offered to overseas mission workers before they go, while they are there, and when they return.

Pre-departure support

Before missionaries go overseas, they need moral support. This can be as simple as conveying, “We’re excited about what God is doing and we are with you.” While this may seem obvious to you, it helps the missionary to counterbalance less than affirming statements such as “Why waste your education?”, “You’ll probably be an old maid if you go on the mission field,” and “Why don’t you get a real job?”, and for married folks, “How can you do that to your kids?” I’ve really heard all those comments. Praying with the future missionary and attending a commissioning service at the church are also great ways to show moral support.

Logistical support can also be provided before the missionary leaves. You could volunteer to take care of donor lists, to do their taxes, or to send them missionary related items such as Sunday school materials when needed. Could you store personal belongings or a car? One major area of logistical support for me was having someone photocopy my newsletter, print out my address labels, and put the newsletters in the mail. Other missionaries may not have access to computers and would appreciate it if you could do word processing as well. You can also offer logistical support in family matters by visiting elderly parents, providing a second home to college-age kids, and serving as executor of the missionary’s will.

On the field support

Once the missionary is on the field, your prayer support can literally change the world. You can pray more intelligently and specifically by reading *Operation World* and of course the missionary’s prayer letter. This helps you to get beyond the “God bless the missionaries” stage. Find a system that works for you to help you pray regularly for missions. You might pray for the missionary listed in the church bulletin that week; you could pray for a different continent each day; or pray alphabetically (keeping the missions pledge card in your Bible helps with both of

these systems). You can pray for health, safety, finances, spiritual growth, language ability, adjustment in culture, a fruitful ministry, and for their children. Pray for missionaries unceasingly (Eph 6:18) as you go about your daily life. If you drop a note saying simply, “I prayed for you today” that will be a great encouragement. Finally, as commanded by Jesus in Matthew 9:35-38, pray passionately for more laborers for the harvest to join the missionary. Whether a missionary survives the first term and returns to the field after furlough may very well depend upon your prayers.

Communication support (a.k.a. “Moral Support Phase II”) involves keeping in touch, keeping the missionary informed, and keeping them encouraged. Don’t be overwhelmed at the thought of writing a long letter. Buy scenic postcards for a quick update; these can be reused by the missionary as decorations or conversation pieces about life back home. If you hate to write, you can call, record messages (a friend’s kids singing was a real “smiler” which I shared around the ship), or send a video recording. My plant-sitters decorated my “kids” for Christmas and sent me the photos. Missionaries’ interests and hobbies don’t change when they leave home. I was thrilled to receive clippings about crafts, recipes, movies, world news, the big snow of the year, news of my favorite sports teams’ victories, etc... The Sunday comics are great because they can also double as Christmas wrapping paper. Speaking of holidays, some stores can sell out-of-season items that can be sent long before the holiday arrives (plan on at least two months for most international mail). When I was packing my belongings for a year into two suitcases, a Christmas music tape hardly seemed high priority, but when the season came, I did enjoy the tape a friend sent. Also, since mail can sometimes be sent with friends returning home, stamps from the home country can come in handy.

Let go creatively. What would you miss if you were gone? Do you know your missionary’s favorite candy bar? A chocolate bar, candy, a stick of gum, and stickers all say, “I care!” My mail highlight was several red and orange leaves from fall, which I missed completely since the seasons are reversed in the southern hemisphere. Another friend received a manila envelope full of leaves with a note to dump them on the floor, shuffle through them, and pretend she was at home. Let missionaries know that they can ask you for things they miss. Paul had this kind of relationship, and felt free to ask in 2 Timothy 4:13, “And when you come, please bring the cloak...the books, but especially the parchments.” To help me with my readjustment back to home life, I felt free to ask for a tape of the latest hits off the radio.

Post-mission support

Readjusting to life back home is often more difficult than learning to live in the foreign country. Thus, reentry support becomes important when missionaries return. You can be supportive by being sensitive to the changes happening professionally, a loss of independence perhaps. Financially, while on the field, maybe hired workers did the cleaning and cooking, and so you could help by volunteering in the transition. Culturally, driving, watching TV, and all those choices at the grocery store may be overwhelming. Linguistically, the missionary may find it hard to find the word in English, and socially, the halo effect given by well-meaning friends may make them uncomfortable. Logistical support may again be offered, since the missionary on furlough may need lodging or a used car that you could provide. Be available to listen to the missionary individually and provide a public time such as Bible studies, Sunday school classes, etc...when they can have the opportunity to speak about their experiences.

If you are obeying God's call for your life by staying at home, you can be part of his work abroad through moral, logistical, prayer, communication, and reentry support for your missionaries. If you don't currently support any missionaries, now is a great time to "adopt" some. Contact your local missionary organization if your church does not have any missionaries whom it supports.

Lisa Calvin returned to the United States in August 1994 after teaching on Operation Mobilization's ship, Logos II. During her year on the ship, Lisa went to ports in Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and the West Indies.