

Ten Reasons Why Missionaries Leave the Field and Don't Return

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Sending Americans for overseas ministry is a time-consuming, costly and hazardous undertaking. If they come home prematurely for preventable reasons it causes hardship on families and cost to the Kingdom.

1. The most important is that God has led them to do so. God often changes our direction and incorporates all of our humanness in it. See *Second Choice* by Viv Thomas.

2. Poor leadership on the field is another reason people 'don't make it' and it is why one of our main ministries must be the training and formation of Godly, gifted leadership which must be combined with helping new believers understand the biblical basis of leadership.

3. Equally important is unrealistic expectations. Books with nice formulae and not enough honesty, balance, and biblical reality often create this unrealistic expectation. Tozer urged us to develop skepticism in connection with some of the things we hear or read about. Godly, gifted leaders are still sinners saved by grace or will continue to sin or fail. We must be ready to forgive and grow together in repentance and brokenness. Leaders have to make hard decisions and there is always someone who is not happy. This sometimes leads to gossip and soon there is a mess. But God can work even in the midst of our people-made messes.

4. Failure in the sexual area is another reason for people returning. Pornography, especially on the web, is causing major damage in frontline mission work. People sometimes face loneliness on the field which can set them up for a "quick romance" that ends in disaster. Read books on this subject like 'The Snare' by Lois Mowday and 'When Good Men Are Tempted' by Bill Perkins. Unfortunately, leaders are often the enemy's targets in this aspect of the spiritual warfare.

5. Personality, strategy, and doctrinal conflict are also near the top of the list of things that send people home for cover. There never seems to be enough time to sort everything out and leaders are often on overload on the way to burnout. Everyone should read *Grace Awakening* by Charles Swindoll.

6. Failure often occurs in language and cultural learning and adaptation. We must be slow to judge, especially what God is doing or not doing. If people are learners and are willing to receive correction and keep growing, then there is always hope. Humility and true servanthood can often make up for shortfall in language and other areas. Often just a willing and disciplined person can be a great worker and team member.

7. The lack of teamwork and pastoral care is another major factor. Many agencies have improved in the past years, but without the I Cor. 13 reality, nothing will really work very well. We need people who have proved the reality of God's grace in their lives, especially before they get into long-term missions. Short-term missions done the right way can often be a great step in that direction. Some short-term work just helps people put their sins and difficult ways into great cement.

8. Problems and complexities at home. Assisted by email, people on the field are still involved at home. Splits and problems in their home churches affect them and often mean loss of support or they are asked to return.

9. Shortage of support or difficult financial pressure. Many never go in the first place because they hate raising support or are unable to raise it. The problems and complexities are endless. Listen to George Verwer's tape, 'Does the Lack of Funds Hinder God's Work?'

10. Satan and his forces are another main reason. We know he militantly opposes world evangelization. He especially loves to sow legalistic and wrong views of God. He comes sometimes as an angel of light and he is a roaring lion seeking whom he can devour. This is why a basic Spirit-filled walk with God is the most important act in staying in the center of God's will.

There are many other reasons why things don't work out on the field but this is enough for us to think and pray about right now.

Source: David Mays, *Stuff you need to know about Doing Missions in Your Church* a CD of missions resources for local churches, produced by ACMC March 2004. Link: www.davidmays.org