

Missionaries Should Communicate---and Churches Should Demand It

On our last missionary furlough I spoke with dozens of pastors and church leaders about their churches' support for missionaries. In difficult economic times most churches were reducing their budgets. Without exception, every single church cutting support to missionaries told me they were going to eliminate support for "the missionary we have been supporting for years, but we just don't hear from anymore."

Eliminating support for non-communicative missionaries is a wonderful idea, for two reasons: (1) churches must be good stewards of the resources they have been given, and throwing money at a missionary who is not a partner with their church is foolish, and (2) missionaries must learn the importance of communicating with the partners in their ministry.

Act Like a Team

Missionaries, you have been called to leave your home and family and culture to go to far-off lands and serve in the name of Christ. That is a beautiful calling, and you should embrace it. The individuals who stay home and pray for your efforts and write checks to support your work are equally called by God to play their role. God has called the missionary to go, and God has also called the supporters to remain home and make missions work possible. The calling is equal. Senders and goers are a team. Act like it.

I have met too many missionaries who view their supporters as a hurdle they must overcome before they can get onto the mission field and do what God has called them to do. When these missionaries are raising their financial support they say all the right things---"partner with me," "join the team" and "accept God's calling." But, as soon as their support is raised they forget about the team with whom God has surrounded them.

As Christians we are responsible to lift up our fellow believers and make it easier for them to glorify God ([Deuteronomy 22:4](#), [Proverbs 27:17](#), [Galatians 6:1-5](#)). Working together to advance God's plan for the world requires prayers, givers, and goers. A major part of our responsibility as goers is to provide the prayers and the givers with everything they need to better pray for us and the people we serve. If supporters of missionaries don't know what to pray for, missionaries have not done their job.

Use Technology

Fellow missionaries have told me, "Doing all that communication work takes time away from ministry." They miss the point. Communicating God's glory and telling the world all the wonderful things he is doing in far-off lands is not a burden; it is part of your ministry. "Let them shout from the top of the mountains" ([Isaiah 42:11](#)).

Communication is not difficult, expensive, or time-consuming. Most Majority World countries have internet access and smartphones. Social media resources (like Blogger, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Skype, and so on) are free and easy to use. Most entry-level digital cameras have both photo and also video capability, as do most smartphones. Websites can manage your newsletter database or send out personalized postcards and "thank you" notes. If indeed missionaries are doing wonderful work, they should shout it from the cyber-mountaintops. There are very few excuses to be a poor communicator in this day and age.

It is not difficult for missionaries to communicate with their supporters. Write a couple blog posts a week, take a picture every day, send out a 140-character tweet, and e-mail a short, picture-filled newsletter once a month. If missionaries even communicated that much, supporters would feel like they are part of the

ministry. When you share the stories of your work with the people who have committed to pray for and support you, then you are helping them to fulfill the Great Commission.

What It Looks Like

In our ministry in Honduras we know some supporters don't subscribe to our tweets, or watch our videos, or even open our e-mailed newsletters. That is fine. But we also know many diligent readers, and they want more information. They want to pray specific prayers for Antonio, they want to see Calisto's face, and they want to know my wife is feeling better. They want to be connected. Communication is not intrusive or burdensome. If people don't have time or simply don't want to read about your ministry, they can delete, unfriend, or save the message for later. But if missionaries aren't sending out regular communication, they are not giving their supporters the choice to get more involved.

Churches and individual partners, you need to insist the missionaries you support are communicating with you. You are just as much a part of that ministry as the missionary in the field. Get passionate about your calling towards missions. Demand regular communication from your missionaries, but also take the initiative. Check in on them. Tell them you pray for them. Prove to them you've been reading their reports. Let them know their communication efforts are not in vain. Take your calling seriously.

Missions is a partnership. Missionaries and prayers and givers have all been called by God to join together in the expansion of his glory. Your mission team has many members who combine their talents to glorify God in the world. When missionaries communicate what God is doing through the combined efforts of our team, the One who called us all gets the glory.

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