



PREPARING FOR MISSION?

Issues to consider if you are in mid life.

Introduction

This information is designed for second wind people who have already worked through some of the initial stages of reflection and prayer and have arrived at the place where they feel God has called them – either to seriously explore further, or maybe to go and check out an opportunity on the ground, or to begin preparing for a period in another culture. It is not for participants in Short Term Teams where most of these issues are covered in Team preparations and information. Some of the issues for people in the second wind demographic are a bit different for young singles and young families, some are the same. We hope this document will help you as you investigate further and we are also happy to talk further with you, help you if we can, or put you in touch with someone who can.

Should I go?

There are 2 questions to ask. Not just “Is missions right for me?” but also “Am I right for missions?” Bring your thoughts and motives before God, and allow Him to highlight any reasons for going that involve escaping responsibilities or difficult relationships. Deal with these things first, then look again at the question.

On the other hand, don't be discouraged by people in your life who may not believe you are doing the right thing. Many people are confronted by friends who step outside their circles, or do something they would not have the courage to do.

Involve the family in the journey. It makes the experience much easier for you and them if they have opportunity to give you their blessing or support. Also, make sure you involve your minister or pastor. If you are going with a mission agency, a reference will normally be required from your pastor and its good to involve him/her in your journey, not just at the last moment when the reference is required!

PREPARATION

Good preparation is a key to your “success”. There are several good publications which will help you to think through spiritual and practical issues, identify your expectations and so forth.

“The Journey Guide” is available from a number of mission organisations and has tips and questions to help guide your preparation. It will help you record your observations and reflect on them so you learn as you go.

Some training is most desirable! If you are going with an organisation, find out what they offer or require as preparation. Their recommendations and requirements are made for your own benefit and equipping. It's easy to think that because you've done previous career or Bible College training why is there an expectation that you should do more. But remember that you would probably have to do regular professional development courses or upgrade your job skills in almost any job situation. Mission is no different and being well equipped and trained may make the difference between a good and bad experience for you, for the church or organisation you are going with and the people you will work among!

Start by doing the Kairos Course www.Kairoscourse.org
or a Perspectives Course www.perspectives.org.au/

Missions Interlink have a live-in two week course aimed at preparing people to work in long term field situations which require transition to another cultural setting, or a four day course for those heading out for shorter periods. For more details see www.ea.org.au/MissionsInterlink/TransitionTraining.aspx and www.ea.org.au/MissionsInterlink/MIST-MissionsInterlinkShortTermTraining.aspx

STINT is 5 day course held in various locations in Australia and New Zealand, by Global Training Ministries www.globaltraining.org.au

TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) If you are going to teach English you need some preparation. There are many good resources for TESOL and some organisations do

training specifically for mission situations eg Intercultural training Associates with courses in various locations in Australia www.interculturaltraining.com.au

How can I prepare for the practical challenges?

Ask as many questions as you can before you go.

Establish good communications with those working in the setting and find out all you can about plans, food, activities, travel arrangements, ministry, accommodation, clothing and financial arrangements.

Read books and find internet information to be as informed as possible about your future location, climate, geography, and people, including information about culture, history, politics and economics.

How can I prepare spiritually for unknown situations?

Have a good prayer support team behind you, and also keep them informed as you prepare.

Organise lines of communication with your prayer support group. Email is best – maybe send material to one and get them to forward it on. (Sometimes you can't send group mail from addresses in other parts of the world and it's better to leave the group addresses with someone in Australia than tie up your line.)

Be in spiritual good health – be prayed up and have your disciplines of personal prayer and quiet times developed – it's harder to schedule regular times in a new environment if you aren't in the routine before you leave.

Be prepared to share aspects of your faith. Prepare some short talks about these.

Take some literature or a study guide with you to use in your Quiet Times – it helps maintain the discipline when other routines are messed around, and you probably won't be able to purchase such material at your destination.

Be accountable to a church leader, or a mission group person. Keep them informed of your plans and schedule a session with him/her when you get back and be honest with them about your achievements and failures.

What if plans change?

In General: Be aware that all plans are open to change or cancellation. Political situations can effect plans, as can weather, other visitors, and health.

Time: Many cultures do not work on western time tables and are much more laid back about making plans, especially in remote locations. In major cities this will be different. Starting and finishing times for meetings may be very fluid – be prepared to start later, stay longer, go home later, or do it tomorrow instead.

Ministry: Do not expect to have all your ministry plans and agenda finalised before you leave home. Be prepared with alternative ministry options or just to help someone else. **Don't undertake any ministry that hasn't first been discussed and cleared by your hosts**, including handing out literature. You may unintentionally cause big problems for the local Christians if you don't follow their guidelines. If your expectations are not met maybe you had unreal expectations to begin with.

Personal: You will probably live in some-one else's home, or a guest-house and will NOT have the space and privacy you are used to. Be prepared for this. If you are in a team, remember that the leaders must make decisions based on the needs of the group, and not just particular individual needs. Don't take things personally if you don't like the decision!

Food: Be prepared to try new foods and not to have all the things you take for granted at home. Times for meals also vary in parts of the world and you will probably have to adjust to both different ingredients and different times. If something is absolutely essential for health reasons think about taking it with you. (Vegemite comes in tubes these days!)

How can I set up safe communication?

Correspondence: Depending on location, internet and email security may be vital. Check to see whether the agency or individual you are joining has a set of security guidelines and if so get hold of them and stick to them. Inform your friends and family of these guidelines so that your or your colleague's viability is not affected.

Email: Set up your own secure email account. Many people working in places with unreliable internet connection send their news to one friend at home, who updates and sends their e-letter, blog or webpage.

Information you distribute at home: Check with the agency you are working with if they have guidelines. If you are going to a sensitive area there may be restrictions on what you can say in writing or publicly.

Visas: If you are going short-term, your visa is expendable, but the termination of a long-term visa of a missionary, or the ministry of a national, is much more serious. *Therefore make sure you do what you are told even if you don't understand the reasons.*

What can I do to look after my health?

Have a medical check-up prior to, and after travel.

Make enquiries with your sending agency or the *Travel Doctor* about medications and vaccinations required specifically for the area you are going to, and update any needed. Take a basic supply of personal medications. If you are going for longer, find out about the availability of these in the area.

Be prepared for normal travel related illnesses: gut and / or bowel problems, and colds. Take a basic supply of medication for travel illnesses to treat things initially (Imodium, Panadol etc).

Take a First Aid kit, prepared accordingly for your destination.

Take a spare pair of glasses or your prescription.

If you exercise regularly at home make some provision to continue this - take suitable clothes and joggers, swimmers or exercise band. (Depending on your destination you could budget for times in a hotel gym or pool. This is a good stress buster too.)

Recommendation: *The Travel Doctor* specialises in all medical matters for travellers. For locations check their website: www.thetraveldoctor.com.au

Email: clinic@travellingwell.com.au

Purchase comprehensive **Travel Insurance** which includes medical evacuation as western medical facilities are not necessarily available. (There are some insurers who specialise in missionary insurance. We recommend that you investigate the MissionCare package available through the Australian Evangelical Alliance Insurance division which was designed in consultation with Australian Mission agencies. <http://www.missioncare.com.au/> Also check with the mission agency you are working with.)

What about my family?

Be prepared to survive without constant contact with home and family. Regular access to email or phone will probably not be possible. It is important to make sure family and friends realise this beforehand.

Register with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) so that family can contact you in an emergency, and tell you family you have registered. Register on line at www.dfat.gov.au

Provide family or friends with all travel and contact details, and any other personal and business information relevant to your situation, including wills and funeral arrangements. Talk this through with your family before you leave as you won't have opportunity once you leave. This is not morbid but practical and necessary.

Invite family to come and visit you but check your agency's policy on this first. It helps them to understand your context and mission can get lonely at times, even in the midst of many people. It is always wonderful to have the company of those who share your sense of humour and a common history. Assisting them with the process of orientation is also helpful in reminding you of the cultural differences and how far you have come in adaptation.

Family and friends may not communicate as often as you would like and this can contribute to a sense of distance. It may be that others are feeling that their lives are dull compared to yours, so encourage them to share aspects of their lives by discussing regular events such as birthdays, achievements and milestones.

See tips for Parents of Missionaries at www.pomnet.org/tipsheets.php

What can I do about finances?

Even if you are on social security and have scrimped and saved to get the money, you are in the top 10% of the richest people on earth, although you may not rank anywhere near that level of wealth in your home country. Remember this in all your dealings.

Get your financial support in order before you go. Leave someone all the details of your financial affairs as there are many things difficult to do from overseas. It may not be suitable to leave this to adult offspring.

Take some cash as it may take time to get your finances sorted in your new location. Find out the best way to access finances as not all countries have ATMs. Banks don't have good information about use of cards in overseas countries, so get recommendations from people working in the country. Find out what the trading currency is where you are going. Organise internet banking if it is available.

Don't assume the cost of living will be much less in majority world countries as there may be unforeseen expenses for you as an expat.

Don't sell your house unless you are sure you never want to live there again. It may not work out the way you planned, or health or family issues may bring you home early. You may choose to leave your house in someone's care rather than rent it out. Whatever the case, hold its care lightly and expect to do repairs and renovations when you return. If you are leaving older children in the house you might choose to charge them board and use the money to pay a cleaner.

If you are going for over two years, it's probably best to sell your car as its value will depreciate while you are away.

If you are required to contribute to team or ministry expenses do so willingly. Have a gracious and generous attitude to others in the team or those in long-term situations. Be aware of the limited budgets of others in longer-term work, especially those working within the constraints of home support.

NB: Check with those working locally before giving ANY gifts to apparently needy people or organisations, especially finance. Many of these people are working to cultivate autonomous churches, and such giving may generate a culture of dependence. If you feel prompted to give, give to the mission leaders who are aware of the long term needs in the area.

How can I prepare for language differences?

It is probable your organisation will expect you to undertake language learning if you are going for more than a couple of months. A little language learning makes an enormous difference if you want to get around on your own and is worth arranging and paying for if you are going for more than just a very short term. Making financial provision for this is wise. Talk this over with the on-site team leaders before you arrive.

Workshops in "Language Learning" skills are very helpful if you are going for a longer period. They are suitable for any language, not language specific. Missions Interlink provide a four day course for this purpose. Details and registration at: <http://www.mill.org.au/>

EQUIP training offered by SIL Australia is also an excellent course. It is available as a 6 week intensive Summer School or as a 12 month course for long term workers. It offers relevant and practical language development training for intercultural workers and is an accredited course. See <http://www.equip.edu.au/>

Be realistic in your expectations. It will take at least two years for any degree of fluency, and older learners will probably never be as proficient as younger learners. If you intend to do a block of language learning, do not undertake to teach English at the same time as you won't have the opportunity to practise the local language.

How will I cope with cultural differences?

It is important to think of what you will encounter as simply "different", not to apply value judgements or use tags such as "right" and "wrong" or "better" and "worse". The main issue is the attitude you go with. It is important to **go as a learner** in every respect, not as a teacher. Donald Larson*, says: "...missionaries will have to measure their effectiveness by the standards of their hosts, not their own. Inevitably the missionary comes to realise that he or she must first be *acceptable* by local standards,

and to be *acceptable*, local community members must first find them *teachable*.” Being prepared with the right **attitude** will make a world of difference to the day by day **events and practices** you encounter, regardless of whether you are in a tribal situation or a modern, first world city.

Read what you can about the culture and make sure you are aware of significant issues. Try to understand the world-view of the people group you are going to. Do some research on the religious bloc you will be working and living in. If you know somebody at home who is from the people group or country you are going to or a missionary who has previously served there, take some time to talk with them and learn from them.

Read something like “East Meets West” or “One World, Two Minds” by Dennis Lane (available from OMF) so you are aware of different communication styles. Also “Serving with Eyes Wide Open” by David Livermore (available from OM) is very helpful.

If clothing is an issue, go prepared to dress appropriately. Most Western clothing is fine these days provided it's modest. Women should be prepared to wear a long skirt in some cultures, and men need cool long pants in hot climates. In most cultures it is expected that you will not dress skimpily. It is better to err on the side of modesty!

Be aware of the footwear customs of the country and take appropriate footwear, comfortable but easy to remove if necessary. Larger sizes are hard to find, especially in good quality shoes, so take these with you.

Most of the people you will be working with will be charming and trustworthy, but don't put temptation in their way by leaving money or valuables around.

Many cultures hold older people in great respect. Honour that respect and be mindful that you are being observed.

So much to do and so little time!

Although you will be very motivated to achieve much, recognise that majority world countries don't move at the pace we do. Relax and enjoy the slower pace, concentrating on building relationships. If you are involved in implementing change, the locals will be more likely to continue this when you leave, if you developed good relationships rather than rushed around getting things done.

Recognise that your life experience equips you for many roles, and be prepared to do whatever is required of you. This may involve doing things which were not part of your plans, or things you feel someone else should do. If you don't achieve everything you planned, don't worry.

At times you may feel inadequate to the task, with language difficulties and a western world view. Be aware of your own limitations and **be prepared to go as a learner**.

If you are going as a professional, or to be involved in a project where your professional skills have qualified you for the task, be prepared to work alongside locals and submit to their leadership. You may have professional skills or be teaching and leading in your specific field, but you will be a partner in the gospel.

Remember that you may well have to work under the leadership of a younger person who is a member of the church or mission organisation, or a professional person from the new culture. It may take a bit of adjustment to this if you are used to being the leader at home. Be prepared for this!

Humbly assess the progress you are making and modify your approach as you go. You may have opportunity to pass on your insights to others.

You will go thinking (secretly) that you are going to bless the people you will serve. Reality is they will probably bless you far more with their approach to life, so absorb and enjoy the blessings God has provided for you; it is a humbling experience to know that we here in the west don't have all the answers!

So I've been, and I'm back. Now what?

You will have had some amazing experiences, adapted to a different culture and made some wonderful friends. These experiences will have changed you in some way, so that you no longer fit into western culture so comfortably. In order to process re-entry stress, **a DEBRIEF isn't an optional extra!** You really need to do this thoroughly. Talk with your team leader or mission organisation about this if there doesn't appear to have been any arrangement made for this.

There is some excellent literature available and some on-line also. But you need to talk through your own experience too. Its best to make arrangements to do this in a formal way – not just take half an hour with your pastor or home group – that is not a debrief! You will have experienced things that will have changed how you see the world and how you understand yourself and God. You may have had some rough times as well as good and exciting times – you need to process all this. It should be done quite soon after you return. It will help you to understand some of the emotions and reactions that you will observe in yourself for months to come.

* Donald Larson is Senior Consultant for Cross-Cultural Living and Learning at Link Care Centre, and Professor of Anthropology and Linguistics at Bethel College, St Paul, Minnesota “The Viable Missionary: Learner, Trader, Story Teller” in *The Perspectives Reader*, 1999, p 440)

You will find lots more information on our website: www.secondwind.net.au

If you would like to discuss any of these points please contact us as follows:

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