

## Caring for Those Who are Sent

### Introduction by Ross Paterson:

*These pages have been written by Christine, and originally formed a chapter in the first version of 'The Antioch Factor'. I feel its content is unique, which is why we are making it available here. The challenge it brings, out of Christine's personal experience as a missionary daughter, wife and mother on the field, is one of the most important messages of the book.*

*The challenge of 'The Antioch Factor' is that it should be the job of the whole Body of Christ to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, not just that of a minority of Christians. Obviously, that does not mean everyone will be called to go. If everyone went, who would be left in support? Who would fulfil the equally important task of reaching the home community for Christ? But there should be many standing behind those who do go – in prayer, in giving and indeed in various other ways, giving substance to the sending church's commitment to the task.*

*The undergirding foundation is one of teamwork. Teamwork means that those who go and those who remain in support are one team, not separate or even competing units. So what happens on the field and what goes on at home are both part of the same endeavour, fulfilling the Lord's command to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Wide personal experience and observation over the years, as well as much discussion with others, has led to the sad conclusion that this kind of support is in reality very rare. It is also extremely contested by the enemy. But where it exists and is sustained, it is exceedingly precious and powerful in winning the unreached. Surely that is why the devil resists it so fiercely.*

Ross Paterson

Ross had been preaching his message on "Pray, Give, Go and Support" for many years before a book came into our hands that gave us a whole new level of understanding. This book, *Serving as Senders* by Neal Pirollo<sup>1</sup>, has been described by George Verwer of Operation Mobilisation as "one of the most significant missionary books of this decade (the 1990's)." Part of its impact is that this missionary book is directed at those who stay behind in support in the home churches, and is not primarily about those who go to the field! I make no apology for referring often to Pirollo's material, as a springboard for my thoughts.

In his preface, Pirollo describes an experience he had one year, sitting in the auditorium at Inter-Varsity's Urbana Student Mission Conference:

I must admit I had begun daydreaming when all of a sudden there was that statement: "In secular war, for every one person on the battle front, there are nine others backing him up in what is called the 'line of communication'."

The concept exploded like a mortar shell! The speaker had been drawing a parallel between secular war and the spiritual warfare that accompanies cross-cultural ministry. He continued, "And how can we expect to win with any less than that ratio? God is not

---

<sup>1</sup> *Serving as Senders. How to Care for Your Missionaries.* Neal Pirollo. OM Publishing, 1997.

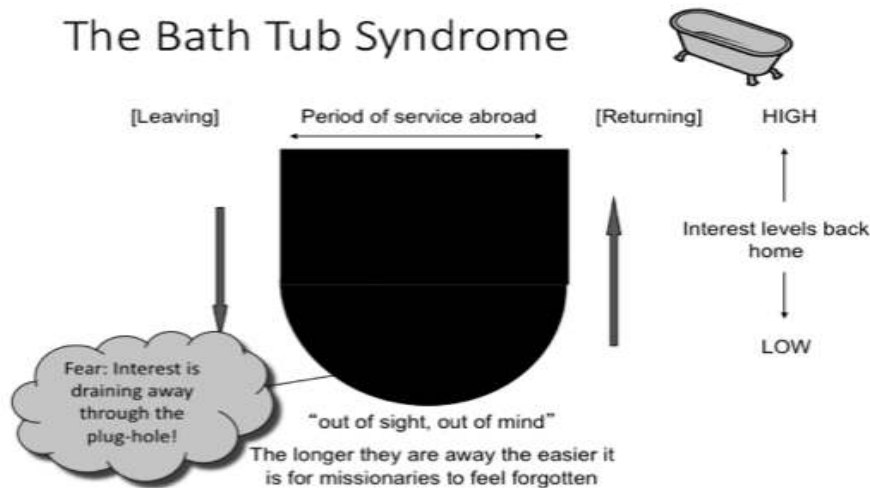
looking for Lone Rangers or superstars; He is commanding an army – soldiers of the cross.”<sup>2</sup>

Pirollo thanked God for confirmation. Without knowing anything about secular warfare, he had already been encouraging students engaged in cross-cultural outreach to build around themselves a team of *nine people* who would pray and support them!

Since that evening at Urbana, with more vigour than ever, I have encouraged, exhorted – even implored – anyone going into cross-cultural outreach ministry not to leave home without a strong, committed support team – a group that accepts the ministry of servicing as senders.<sup>3</sup>

I love the idea of each missionary serving overseas finding nine people at home who are willing to serve in the way Neal Pirollo describes in the rest of his book. But the reality is that for most missionaries actually on the field today, the picture is far, far different from that. They have the daily challenges of life on the field to contend with – unremitting cultural issues; difficulty with the language, food and climate; loneliness and homesickness; struggles with indifferent health perhaps; spiritual oppression and stress and so on. Yet, above and beyond these, they also have to wake up to the realisation that the longer they are away overseas, the less connected with those at home they become and the less supported they feel. That double pressure can often be overwhelming. The intent of this chapter is to encourage local churches to raise up support teams based on Pirollo’s nine-to-one ratio (though actually fewer than that works very well too!)

The term the ‘bathtub syndrome’ has been coined to describe the dynamics involved for many. The following diagram represents the level of interest from those back home, as typically experienced by those on the field:



If we take the upper rim of the bath (both sides) as showing the times when interest from back home is at its highest, we will note that this is first the case in the early days when missionaries

<sup>2</sup> Ibid: first page of the Preface of *Servicing as Senders*

<sup>3</sup> Ibid: first page of the Preface of *Servicing as Senders*

are newly sent out and have just arrived on the field. In those early, so-called ‘honeymoon’ days everything is new and exciting to both workers and sending church. They most likely write home a great deal, sharing their new life with church, family and friends. There then follows a second period when, as the hard grind of language study sets in or the romance dies in the face of every-day reality, there is little in the way of exciting news to report. At the same time there is a complementary dynamic back home. Folk get used to them not being around anymore, communication wanes and the level of interest begins to die down. Pretty soon they find themselves bumping along the bottom of the bath, sensing that very few back home are really remembering them in prayer or standing with him in the work. They feel ‘out of sight and out of mind’, but have no idea how to address the problem without sounding complaining or negative.

Then, after two or three years, the church bulletin announces that the missionary is coming home again and will be available to share in home groups in the church. Suddenly there is a reawakening of interest. It is hard to avoid the perception when this occurs that, as far as the average church member back home is concerned, only what happens in the local church, in the here and now of their own ‘Jerusalem’, really counts. What the missionary is doing out there in the ‘ends of the earth’ does not register, after those early days, on the church’s care-and-prayer Richter Scale. In reality there is not much of a team concept about it. The missionary’s work in faraway places is not perceived as part of the local church’s real world. It is part of another alien world.

That is not how it should be. Pirolo cites Romans 10:13–15 (*italics mine*), which shows this clearly:

For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a *preacher*? And how shall they preach unless they are *sent*? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!"

We see from this passage that there are *two* dimensions of involvement for those who take seriously the fact that in the world today there are still an estimated 2.5 billion people who have never received a culturally relevant presentation of the Gospel. The first is the involvement of the ‘preacher’ – the one who is sent (v15); the second is the involvement of the ‘sender’ – the one who sends the preacher out.

Those who go and those who serve as senders are like two units on the same cross-cultural outreach team. Both are equally important. Both are vitally involved in the fulfilment of the Great Commission. Both are dynamically integrated and moving toward the same goal. And both are assured of success, for those in God’s work are on the winning team!<sup>4</sup>

Our longing is that local churches and their members would be gripped by this concept in our day, so as to mitigate against the ‘bathtub’ experience for those who are sent out. This once used to be the much more the case! Take the example of the Student Volunteer Movement, which began with a hundred people in 1886 and went on to send 20,000 missionaries

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid: *Serving as Senders*: p.5

worldwide. This same movement mobilised an army of over 80,000 mission-minded people who pledged themselves to stay at home and support those who went.

Even that does not equate to the nine to one ratio mentioned earlier as the goal, but in terms of passion and commitment it certainly surpasses the average level of support nowadays! In our experience of the modern church, the task of caring for those who are sent out is frequently relegated to a small group of already over-committed folk, who, on top of other responsibilities, are supposed to pray maybe once a month for all the church's missionaries. There is a bit of an imbalance there, if we compare the amount of time that is committed to praying about local concerns! That same imbalance applies to all the required areas of support listed below.

In *Serving as Senders*, Pirollo has identified at least six distinct kinds of support, which are required. They are, in his words:

- 1] Moral support – just ‘being there’.
- 2] Logistics support – all the bits and pieces.
- 3] Financial support – money, money, money.
- 4] Prayer support – spiritual warfare at its best.
- 5] Communication support – letters, tapes and more.
- 6] Re-entry support – more than applauding the safe landing of a jumbo jet.<sup>5</sup>

The particular mix required by the individual, couple or family going to the field will depend very much on their circumstances. The balance will also change from time to time, or as seasons change. But whatever the case, one thing is sure: giving adequate support in the long term represents far more work than one or two people, however committed, can do alone. And it is more than one group can adequately do for more than one missionary unit. Ideally, each individual, couple or family should have a separate support group, comprised of folk who have expressed a particular interest and commitment specifically *to them*. The group also needs a committed leader, for the job to be done well. And, although the different kinds of support overlap to a degree, it is usually the case that team members are drawn to and gifted for one aspect or the other, so different roles can be identified and assigned.

The best example we know, where this concept is really working, is actually the couple who introduced us to the whole idea! When they returned to working with Scripture Union in India, after some years of running an international school in that country, they felt a strong need to build up their support systems again. Someone had lent them a copy of *Serving as Senders*, which rang all sorts of bells with them. Based on that and after much earnest prayer, they approached some couples in their local area back home and some family members and friends from further afield, asking them to consider taking on the specific role and responsibilities of being “senders” for them. The local couples became the core members of the group, taking on responsibility for managing their finances, for prayer cover (including sending out their update letters) and for the short-term missions youth programme they were inaugurating. While most of the ‘business’ was handled by the core group, the other members were also kept informed, especially of more confidential prayer needs, with the aim that they should get together whenever possible.

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid: *Serving as Senders*: p.11

This has been operating for a number of years now, and despite some ups and downs, has been the envy of many, including ourselves. [In the meantime, these dear friends, Rod and Ruthie Gilbert, have taken the concepts even further and have written their own small book on the subject, which we collaborated with them on.<sup>6</sup>] However, truth be told, the essence of the whole idea is that what works for one family or context may not completely fit as a model for another in a different situation. Each couple, and each group, needs to seek for God's leading as to how things are meant to fit together in their own specific circumstances. There is no blueprint that is totally right for all.

One powerful argument for the need for such support groups comes from the disquieting and sad statistics of those who 'don't make it' on the mission field<sup>7</sup>. The question arises as to whether it is just simply a matter of failure on the part of the missionary, or whether there is more to the picture than that. Most will have gone out with a clear sense of calling, with the promise of strong support and high hopes of being able to make a difference in their adopted culture. It is just when the 'romance' of the early days wears off, where the need for encouragement is at its greatest, that all too often the bottom-of-the-bathtub experience kicks in. The embattled missionary feels abandoned at the point when he most needs to sense that others are standing with him. This is by no means always the story. But it is nevertheless true that some have returned from the field with the stigma of not being "suitable material", when, in reality, it might simply be that they lacked the tangible support of those who could and should have stood with them.

Our own particular missionary odyssey serves to illustrate some of these very real issues. At the time that we were married in 1975, Ross had already been a missionary in Taiwan for six years. We then worked together on the field for a further four years, before the Lord redirected us towards serving Christians on the mainland of China, initially from a base in the UK. Up to that point we had been supported totally out of one sending church. The Lord did not move us out again to the mission field for a further fifteen years, by which time Ross had planted a new church in the UK (where he served as Senior Pastor for a number of years) and also had started from scratch two China ministries from our base in England. When we did finally move overseas again, this time to Singapore in 1994, it was far too easy to make assumptions about support, based on our previous experience in the former church. In the whirlwind of preparations to move the whole family and the international base of the ministry abroad, we did not realise soon enough that the expectations we had projected had not necessarily been 'owned' or even understood by those back home. So, what to us had been a commissioning service, when we had been "commended to the grace of God for the work" (Acts 14:26), had been viewed by many in the church as a farewell service, the perception being that we were emigrating and thus leaving the church completely!

In sharing this, I am not attributing blame in any sense. For one thing, we did have a prayer support group in that church, who prayed for us during some difficult times. But we are older and wiser now. We now know that certain principles, however clear they may be to us, do not get through to others by some sort of 'spiritual osmosis'. These matters need to be clearly discussed and expectations clarified before someone goes to the field, or certain misunderstanding and pain will follow! This matter of support needs thinking through with the greatest of clarity. Those who feel called to give it need to be aware of what it should involve

---

<sup>6</sup> *PACT to Go – A Guide to Building Personal Accountability and Care Teams* is available on Amazon

<sup>7</sup> One shocking report we have heard is that one in four missionaries or missionary couples fails to last even to the end of a second term on the field. And missionary attrition statistics are even more alarming for new sending countries that don't have a long history in training and preparation for the field.

and what it might cost them in the long haul, just as surely as the one who goes to the field needs “to count the cost” of going.

One of the specific ‘words’ the Lord gave us around the time we were seeking Him concerning the timing and location of our return to the field proved very significant and encouraging in the months and years that followed. It came from a dear friend in that church we had planted, who felt the Lord say about the base He was taking us to, that He would “build a fortress right in the Lion’s den and it shall be secure as a rock – even in the mouth of the Lion.” Little did she know (as we did) that Singapore actually means Lion City and furthermore that we had already been wondering if that might be the place of God’s appointing for us! So you can imagine that word proved to be a very solid confirmation of His guiding. However, the prophetic word went on to indicate that it was going to be tough – although we would “not be destroyed,” yet we would need to experience God’s “rescue”. In all the preparations, we little thought as to what that was likely to entail. Nor did we sufficiently forearm ourselves for the fierce spiritual onslaught, which began just as soon as we landed. Within a few short weeks, just about everything we thought had been in place before we arrived (house, office and schooling for the children in particular) had systematically unravelled for us; Ross was finding it impossible to find adequate administrative help in the work and we were trying to function while ‘camping’ with a friend in her apartment. All of us were struggling in different ways, probably the children most of all.

The battles that we experienced should not be understood as being related to Singapore as such. Granted the ends-of-the-earth agenda in the Lord’s call to move there and (specifically) our commitment to serve China and her church, the attacks against us doubtless would have happened anywhere, in any country where we might have made our base. Singapore indeed in some senses may have made them more (not less) possible to endure because of the quality of its government and environment. It is an unusually safe and ‘green’ state.

It is also worth observing that both of us are experienced missionaries. Ross had previously been on the field for ten years, and had travelled extensively. I myself was born in Africa of missionary parents, had grown up with mission as my base parameter and had also spent four years on the field. If *we* faced this kind of battle, and needed help which we did not find in sufficient quantity, what of those who go with no experience into the “lion’s den”? This really is a serious issue.

Satan’s strategy against us at that time, it seems to me, was at least threefold:

*Firstly* as I said, he brought wave after wave of attack against us, leaving us wondering how the Lord could be with us if things were going so consistently wrong.

*Secondly*, he sought to undermine our support structures in all quarters back home, so that we would become too worn down from the lack of encouragement on all sides to stay.

*Thirdly*, on top of everything else, we battled “offence” against some of our friends and colleagues, who we perceived to have drawn back from us when we most needed them, so that our spiritual standing was in danger of being compromised, thus rendering us ineffective<sup>8</sup>. In the end, I have to admit, there was one point when Ross was in a minority of one in favour of

---

<sup>8</sup> We received great help at that time from a book by Barney Coombes called *Snakes and Ladders* (later retitled as *Dealing with What Life Throws at You*), especially chs. 8-10 dealing with the whole issue of “skandalon” or “offence” - and how to get out of it.

our staying on the field! I have repented of this long since, but I became so desperate after some time, that I actually prayed to *die*, not wanting to dishonour my husband by leaving him and the work, but also not seeing how I and the girls could continue to struggle on. At that point communication back home regarding what we were going through dwindled to almost zero, though Ross had to be in regular ‘business’ contact. Thus one vital lesson for churches to grasp is that there are times when no news definitely is *not* ‘good news’!

There were a few individuals who did stay in close communication with us, however, during that time. They were the ones who we knew were praying fervently for us. In a very real sense, I believe we owe it to them that we were able to make it through what was for us an “evil day” (Ephesians 6:13) and still be standing at the end! May the Lord reward them for their faithfulness to us. While their prayer support was vital, and I shall go into that more below, I believe it was just as much the *moral support* these few dear encouragers gave us that sustained us at that time. These ‘Barnabas friends’ affirmed us by standing with us in our call and vision. They saw the reversals we were experiencing as the enemy’s attack, which it was their responsibility to repulse by prayer. What a difference that made. Slowly but surely, we turned the corner, seeing with each setback a new answer from the Lord. Little by little we did become established in the ‘lion’s mouth’!

There was much at stake. The base that is now established in Singapore has been responsible for considerable blessing to the church in China. In retrospect we can see that the enemy was seeking to ‘kill’ this new phase of the work. If we had given up, there would have been serious loss for China. It may seem harsh, but perhaps it is not too much to say that churches who fail to encourage, or who actively discourage, those who are on the field will have to accept a serious measure of responsibility before God for what may be lost as a result.

On the positive side, Pirolo conveys his challenge to the supporter powerfully when he writes:

God’s call on your life to serve as a sender must be just as vibrant as the call on the life of the one you send. Likewise the commitment you make must be as sure as that of your cross-cultural worker. The responsible action you take is as important as the ministry your field worker undertakes.

And the reward of souls for God’s kingdom will be equal to your missionary’s faithfulness and your own.<sup>9</sup>

If it is done to that standard of excellence, this is no soft option!

We need to look in more detail at the list of support categories Neal Pirolo gives:

#### 1] Moral support – ‘just being there.’

This might involve anything that a good football supporter might give to his team – not the hooligan elements that give football clubs a bad name, but the best kind of “fans” who want to see their team do well and are there to cheer them on in the good times and the bad. So, in the same way, it means standing with your missionaries through thick and thin, rooting for them, affirming their call, believing in them, encouraging them to hang on till they see a

---

<sup>9</sup> *Serving as Senders*: p.10

breakthrough, or whatever the need may be. If you do not feel you can have this attitude and maintain it, then do not volunteer!

Offering good moral support requires being a good listener and being slow to judge. Believe the best, not the worst, if things seem to be unravelling. Let any advice or critique come after much contact and attempts to understand what is really going on, bearing in mind that otherwise it can be very hard to accept, leading potentially to offence and a breakdown in the relationship.

Front-line warfare often demands extreme measures and in front-line missions the same will be true. It may involve, for example, the necessity of sending children to boarding school to ensure an adequate education for them. In our experience, very few people who have to entertain this option do so easily or willingly, but only after much agonising. Therefore the home-based Christian needs to be very careful not to condemn what may be the *only option* for staying on the field.

Of all the hard issues missionaries face on the field, almost none can be harder than those involving their children. Some couples have even decided not to have children at all in a missions context, in view of such difficulties. Those who do have families will need to resolve the dilemma of how, after a certain age, to educate them. Should they consider home schooling whilst still on the field, with all the time and effort that will entail and the lack of a peer environment for the children? Should they send them to local schools, with the difficulty that will present later when they have to re-insert into the home culture? Should they trust God for the considerable finances involved in sending them to private international schools? Should they “bite the bullet” over the boarding option? Or should they even leave the field for a season to put their family first?

Another similar “hot potato” is what to do about elderly parents back home and how to care for them if they become infirm. If education of children is the toughest issue for families, this one is often the real “biggie” for single folk, ladies in particular, who often will feel the onus falls on them in this matter. It is our observation that God seems to guide people differently on a whole range of such issues. We are trying to learn not to criticise or judge if anyone decides differently from how we would in any of these areas. I suggest that anyone who is serious about giving moral support to their missionary on the field needs to do the same.

A few years ago Ross and I had to face a certain amount of misunderstanding with some of those who are concerned for us, when we felt God leading us differently from how He led my parents, who served in Africa, in similar circumstances thirty years before. In 1964, my parents received news from my sister that things were not going well with one of my brothers and myself back in the UK. They had vowed before the Lord that if ever they heard that any of us children seriously needed them, they would leave the field immediately and return home, which is exactly what they did. My mother was on the next flight home, while my father worked until he could reasonably be released (about six months later) and then he followed. It was not easy for them, but they left the field for a total of five years, during which time they saw us come through much of what we had been struggling with and become more established in our lives. Then they returned to a whole new and exciting sphere of service in Scripture Union in Africa, the most fulfilling time of their lives.

In our case, however, while the issues on the surface might have seemed similar, yet the leading we believed we were receiving from the Lord was not the same. Before we ever had children, Ross received a promise from the Lord, which was that if we continued to follow His leading,



He would take care of our children's education. This was extremely contested over the years, but the Lord was true to His promise and provided in some utterly amazing ways for our family. Moreover, with all the "roller-coaster" experiences they themselves have had, our children never requested that we permanently return home, nor did they want us to – except perhaps during the early days in Singapore.

"Moral support is the very foundation of the support system," Pirolo states, and it is "as much an attitude that your cross-cultural worker will *sense* as an action you can *perform*" (italics mine).<sup>10</sup> Conveying that the missionary is valued, not a nuisance or a burden, and that his concerns are your concerns could make all the difference in distressing or difficult circumstances. It may even make the difference between success and failure on the field. There have been many examples down through the years to show that this is so.

## 2] Logistics support – 'all the bits and pieces'.

In Neal Pirolo's view, logistics support for the missionary is needed on two distinct levels, which we think should probably be the domain for the overall leader of the group. He should at least have a finger on the pulse in both areas. The first is that of pastoral concern for the missionary's personal circumstances on the field; the second is that of giving practical help for any ongoing needs at home.

Firstly, *pastoral awareness and concern for the situation on the field*. This could involve liaising with the sending agency or host churches regarding living conditions, personal needs, utilising of gifts, family issues, policies regarding education and so forth. It requires great finesse and sensitivity on the part of the person concerned, with the ability to ask the right questions, especially if cultural issues need to be clarified. There is also the area of encouraging spiritual growth by sending Bible teaching, books, digital format etc.

[A note of caution needs to be sounded at this point. It is very important for all concerned that there should be no confusion as to the nature and role of the Support Team here. I am suggesting in this chapter that every missionary would do well to have a solid group of supporters at home who are rooting for him and helping him in manifold different ways. But that is not to imply that the group has any actual *authority* to override either the sending agency at home or those in charge on the field. That is why finesse and sensitivity are required, lest supporters are perceived to be muscling in inappropriately in areas that are not their proper concern. We are therefore talking only in 'Barnabas' terms here, as discussed in Chapter 8 of *The Antioch Factor* – that the missionary should feel cared for and affirmed as he seeks to fulfil his vision and call.<sup>11</sup>]

The second area is that of *taking care of practical needs at home*. Depending on the circumstances, this could involve dealing with house or apartment letting, taxes, letters, bills, pension or requests for items that need to be sent. While one person should probably be in overall charge, there will definitely be a need to spread the load or it can soon seem too much, however willing one may be. The question of the gifting of the support team is important here. Some people love to take on simple practical tasks, like hunting down a vital car part or computer component, whereas to someone else that would be an enormous pressure! Some folk who love systems, find putting out a regular prayer letter and managing an address

---

<sup>10</sup> *Serving as Senders*: p. 29

<sup>11</sup> See chapter 8 of *The Antioch Factor* for further brief comments regarding sending agencies and service on the field.

database to be easy, whereas others would find it extremely burdensome, however vital it may be.

Depending again on the circumstances, it might be necessary for someone (probably again the leader) to have legal power of attorney to manage the missionary's financial affairs. It might also involve someone taking on guardianship for younger children or offering support and a free bed to older ones who are at college or working in the home country (patience and persistence required!). Or again, watching over elderly parents, being the first port of call in an emergency.

Knowing that such things are being taken care of will bring real peace of mind to those on the field. Imagine in your life having to deal with all the daily things you carry – from three thousand miles away, and in duplicate (because you must face them on the field as well as at home). If that is not an argument for support groups, nothing else will be!

Giving logistics support is often time-consuming and can be burdensome and even annoying, unless the right people are doing it. How any given group might determine to cover these areas will differ, but whatever conclusions are reached, they should come up for frequent review. Experience shows that otherwise there are all manner of things the enemy would love to exploit in order to undermine this precious support system. For those at home it can be a feeling of being taken for granted. For those on the field it might be a sense of being considered a burden, which could make them reticent to ask for help even when it is sorely needed. Open and honest debate is required on both sides to avoid such misunderstandings and the offences that might arise from them.

### 3] Financial support.

To this section, Pirolo gives as a sub-heading: “Money, money, money”, but this is one of the few areas where I disagree with him! There are too many people out there already who feel that a missionary is only after their money! To my mind the primary need is for the support group to take financial *responsibility* for their missionary and his/her work. That does not mean that they personally have to ‘cough up’ the necessary finance, but they could certainly help in ascertaining what funds are needed, then stand with them to see that that amount is raised. They could take the initiative in representing the needs in their own contact circles, thus sharing the load of fundraising with less awkwardness perhaps. At times this solidarity might be quite radical, as with one group, which decided that until funds could be found to buy a vehicle for their missionary on the field, they would go without using their own, managing as best they could with walking and public transport. It certainly gave urgency to their prayers!

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to go into all the facets of what is involved in providing financial support for missionaries. Others have already done an excellent job of presenting this need - see the rest of Neal Pirolo's chapter on the subject in *Serving as Senders*<sup>12</sup>. I would also highly recommend both missionaries and their supporters to read *Friend Raising*, by Betty Barnett<sup>13</sup>. Its basic tenet, as the title suggests, is the simple fact that *friendship* lies at the root of the support one is seeking, not just money. My purpose, though, in looking at this subject is a little different. I would like to approach this from the missionary's point of view.

---

<sup>12</sup> Chapter Five: *Serving as Senders* p. 90 – 116

<sup>13</sup> YWAM Publishing (1991)

As a missionary myself, I have some perceptions that may not be immediately obvious to some who have not lived on the field.

Often a missionary has to raise a certain base level of support – financial and prayer – before he can even go to the field. This can result in a certain guardedness among folk on the receiving end of a missionary sermon, as alluded to above. This in turn can give rise to great awkwardness surrounding the whole issue in the missionary’s own mind (or perhaps even more in his wife’s). There can be a feeling of guilt about spending money that has been given sacrificially, or of being in some way a ‘second-class citizen’, because one is perceived to be living on hand-outs, rather than earning a salary in the normal way. Frequently such a perception can even be reinforced by comments that are made, either deliberately or (often) unthinkingly, by others.

I well remember an incident that lodged with me in a very painful way for years. It was 1980. We had been back from Taiwan for a number of months and it was clear by now that we would not be going immediately back to Asia, so we needed a home. We had been housed to date in a place that was awaiting renovation and had no central heating – throughout the UK winter! Our second daughter Hannah was imminently due, and we simply could not face a second winter in that house with both a toddler and a tiny baby. Then out of the blue we had the offer of using a home while the owner was out of the country; it was in just the right area and seemed to be the perfect answer. However, when we went to look round the house, I made the mistake of asking if we might move a few of the owner’s things to make room for some of our own bits and pieces while we were there. Suddenly the dear sister rounded on me with words that cut me to the quick: “Beggars can’t be choosers,” she snapped, dismissing the subject out of hand. A few days later her unbelieving husband rang us and withdrew the offer, much, I have to say, to our relief, since we could not envisage being able to live under the pressure of that kind of attitude. There was a good end to the story – the Lord had a far better solution for us, which only came to light when this fell through!

***Beggars can’t be choosers!*** Is that really the perception that missionaries are required to embrace and live with – and to raise their children to accept? Jesus certainly did not say that. In Mark 10:29 He states categorically that

There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the Gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time... and in the age to come eternal life.

What a promise to depend on! This is no niggardly picture of what missionary living is all about. To be sure there are the “persecutions” that are also mentioned (v30) – there is definitely a price-tag here! – but not a hint of penny-pinching or guilt trips.

The Scriptures encourage us to see ‘living by faith’ as an adventure of experiencing how many and various are the ways our heavenly Father can use to supply our needs. As someone has put it, it can (at times) be a hand-to-mouth existence – His hand to our mouth! But then even those who earn a pay packet in the normal way should also view that as God’s provision for their needs – after all, all we have and are is a gift from Him. That is why I prefer to think in terms of taking responsibility rather than just raising finance.

Responsibility in support-team terms means taking a personal interest in the welfare of the ones who are sent out, and in their families, and in the work that they are engaged in. It means representing their needs to others, so that they do not always have to do so for themselves. It

means budgeting for quality family time and taking time to find out if there are special needs or concerns. It means being sensitive to the Holy Spirit on the whole issue of giving, and cultivating a generous and imaginative heart to consider how you would feel in those circumstances, if you were in their shoes. It might also mean giving practical help in the whole area of managing finance, so that resources can go further. All these issues and more need to be discussed and prayed over and dealt with openly before the Lord.

Our personal testimony is that God is true to His promise quoted above – it is now over *fifty* years since Ross embarked on his missionary career and, while there have been some tests along the way, we have never seriously lacked for anything. Indeed the abundance of God's provision has often been embarrassing! But that abundance has frequently put us in a position to help others too, which has been a double blessing.

#### 4] Prayer support – spiritual warfare at its best.

This is another huge subject to which I cannot hope to do justice here. We have in any case written on it elsewhere (again, see *The Antioch Factor*, chapter 12). But the bottom line is this: nothing underlines the team aspect between missionary and support group so much as this area of prayer. And it is, as Pirolo's heading here suggests, a case of real spiritual warfare, with your missionary being, as it were, 'on the front-line'. The more strategic the work he is doing, the more dangerous he will be seen to be by the enemy and the more he, his family and his ministry will be targeted for attack. It is our experience that one can almost 'map' the times when bizarre occurrences are likely to occur, because they generally come at moments of attempted spiritual advance in the work.

The enemy's target in spiritual warfare is always to wound and discourage, so that we cannot press home such spiritual advances. His methods are as varied as they are vicious. Your prayers could mean the difference between spiritual breakthrough and continuing discouragement and struggle. There really are times, when prayer being offered up on one's behalf can actually be *felt* as the sudden lifting of spiritual heaviness, like the sun breaking through the clouds.

Some years ago my sister, a missionary at the time in Rwanda, Central Africa, rang me when I happened to be in England, during a period when she and my mother were both feeling under spiritual attack, with all sorts of things going wrong. Mostly these were things of a practical nature – computer problems, electricity stoppages and other difficulties, on top of work and relational pressures. We all know how stressful times like that are even in our own home environment. "Who is actually praying for us at the moment?" she asked. I quickly rang round their support group, explaining the need.

The next day she sent me the following in a fax:

"What a difference it makes to know people are praying! On the way back from Kigali yesterday, I commented that I felt a lightness of the spirit that I had not had for several days. And yesterday was a fantastic day..." She went on to describe how all the things that we had requested prayer for had been answered. Being interceded for really does make that tangible a difference. It may not even be that the setbacks or problems suddenly evaporate, but it can feel like there is a 'bubble' around you, making them not seem so bad!

Of course, the onus in this respect is just as much on the missionary, who must take responsibility for keeping a flow of information going regarding his/her prayer needs – not

forgetting to share the encouragement of answers to prayer. We have adopted a catchphrase, which helps us to keep this focus: *information breeds intercession*. If we want folk to pray for us with insight, then it is up to us to keep them informed. That is the almost universal rule, though there are some exceptional intercessors, who do not need that flow of information quite so much.

During that period of blackness mentioned above, when I found it so hard to think of sharing much with anyone back home, one of the intercessors in the UK would telephone us in Singapore from time to time. Because of the depth of her intercession, she could actually tell me what I was going through, since she was experiencing it as well, vicariously, as she prayed. But that is the exception rather than the rule. It is more normative for folk to be inspired to pray by the details we give them in our updates and newsletters. Gradually a picture can be built up of how things are for us on the field. In this way, our supporters get to know our national and mission co-workers and colleagues by name, so as to pray for them too. There is something very heart-warming for a missionary when those who pray ask for the latest on so-and-so, indicating that they really have been following the situation as it has developed on the field. Conversely there is no greater 'give-away' than a revelation of total ignorance about even the most basic details of the missionary's life on the field!

Hopefully we will have lots of prayer supporters receiving our updates and standing with us in the work. However some things we face are more personal and sensitive and would not be appropriate to share with everyone. These would be the special remit of your closer support group to pray for, on the understanding that any such matters shared with them must be held in total confidence. For example, concerns about the family, struggles with the work or perhaps with colleagues (being careful what we say and how we say it!), private health concerns, possible future plans and so on. This is a further expression of the moral support mentioned above; it means so much when we can share with transparency and know we will not be judged, but that our needs will be taken up in earnest prayer. How blessed are those missionaries who have folk they can depend on in that way! There is no power on earth that can match what is available to us at the Throne of Grace. Intercessory prayer is the God-ordained channel for bringing that power to bear. Prayer is also a two-way street! If, when praying, you receive a scripture, a word of encouragement or a 'picture' that might speak to the situation you are praying about, do you share it? It might not mean much to you, but could be very relevant and give real comfort and insight to the one you are praying for.

Which brings us to the next area of support...

5] Communication Support – there are so many means now at our disposal!

This whole area is, of course, closely linked to all the other aspects of support we are talking about, since without good communication going on, the whole support system breaks down. No one who has not 'been there' can fully understand what getting a chatty letter or a packet from home means to those on the field. Before the onset of email communication, letters were (and in some places still are) *the* vital link with home, and a visit to the post office to collect mail would be an exciting (or sadly all too often a disappointing) daily ritual.

We all know that it takes discipline to keep good communication going. Personally, in the press of day-to-day living, I used to find letters hard to write and then, ridiculously, just as difficult to remember to post! How much easier it is to keep in touch nowadays, with all the new digital means of communication we have at our disposal. Email, Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, not to

mention social media of various kinds... So many ways of keeping in touch instantly with people all over the world. Let's make sure we use all these means to make our missionary friends feel wanted, appreciated and cared for by frequent, loving contact! These new methods also lend themselves to creative use from the field end as well. One mission partner who joined our group for a number of years used to set her alarm for a very early hour in the morning so she could actually join her support group remotely for their monthly get-together when they would be praying for her. Unsurprisingly, that made a great difference to how connected they all felt with one another!

If it is our responsibility as the ones on the field to keep information flowing, so our supporters can pray intelligently for us, it is also vital for our maintaining of connection back home that we hear news from there. How wonderful when friends remember to share the *gossip* as well as the important news! I want to know who is getting married, who has had a baby, who has graduated and got a job (or is needing a job), who is sick and needing *my* prayers, and especially (so as not to be faced with too many shocks on my return), who has passed away or moved on. We once shared in the anguish of a colleague when friends back home failed to inform her of a loyal prayer supporter's sudden death! She had spent several weeks trying to contact her, before getting in touch with someone else to help. Only then was she informed, as if she ought to know, that this friend had passed away! She found herself then in the complicated place of needing to process both grief and bitterness, that *no-one* had thought to inform her of such an important matter. Please let's be aware of this possibility. It is better by far to hear news many times over rather than not to receive it at all, so let's err on the side of duplication rather than leaving it to chance!

With social media keeping us better connected these days, we might easily assume that 'our missionaries' can do all that is needed on their own to keep in touch and don't need our help to keep abreast of news. But take it from me, there is no substitute for feeling that someone cares enough for you far away to pass on snippets of home news to you, not to mention photos of events you have missed but would have loved to be part of, good jokes or funny episodes (within reason) and suggestions for helpful talks to listen to. Such caring connection goes a long way to counteracting the 'bathtub syndrome' and to making eventual re-entry much easier. One could also do the same towards the congregation – ask permission to include an extract from the missionaries' prayer letter in the church bulletin, then advertise that the full letter is available to anyone who is interested. 'Gossip' their news around church too, to keep their issues alive – especially in the mind of the pastor and leaders. If your church has an email chain, be sure to put out any (non-confidential) emergency items for prayer, being careful also to inform of the answers when they come.

#### 6] Re-entry support:

Every missionary knows about and should be, to some extent, prepared to face the culture shock one encounters on going to the field. But how about 'reverse culture shock', which most also experience, without being prepared for it, on their return to the home country? This is another 'danger point' in the missions experience, parallel to the bottom-of-the-bathtub one mentioned above. This is when horror stories can occur – contemplated suicides, breakdowns and loss of faith amongst returnee missionaries, who feel at odds with life away from the field and with their reception back home. There is, it is true, an increased awareness nowadays of the problems involved in re-entering one's own culture after sometimes years of being away. Whole books are being written and courses are being run on the subject and more and more

sending agencies are incorporating a ‘debriefing’ element into their approach for missionaries both on and off the field<sup>14</sup>.

It is perceived these days that *preparation* for re-entry is needed and ideally should begin before the returnee leaves the field and should be continuing on his return. The support group needs to remain involved throughout, as the ones who are primarily concerned to walk the returning missionary and his family through any ‘matters arising’ from their term on the field. Ideally the group would anticipate problems ahead of time and be on hand with affirmation and understanding, seasoned with a little challenge if need be. They need themselves to have read some of the very helpful books that are now available on the subject of re-entry stress, so as to be armed with helpful insights. Examples of helpful books would be *Re-Entry*, by Peter Jordan<sup>15</sup>, *The Re-entry Team* by Neal Pirolo and *Burn Up or Splash Down* by Marion Knell. There is also a useful chapter on this topic in the more erudite classic, *Overcoming Missionary Stress*, by Marjory F. Foyle<sup>16</sup>

The underlying causes of difficulty for returning missionaries are not hard to find, but actually recognising the danger signs requires time and effort on the part of their friends and family. Here are some of the more common difficulties:

- The feeling that *everything has changed* – the missionary himself by what he has been through; the others he knew, who have adjusted to his absence and moved on.
- Unfamiliarity, bewilderment even, with what others are so used to and take for granted (for example, hypermarkets, the internet – and the rapid rate of change in every area of life).
- A sense of *not belonging* any longer, and maybe even not wanting to belong, because values in the local church no longer sit easily. A constant comparing with life ‘over there’ is standard. There is also the contrast of feeling useful and appreciated on the field, but useless and not understood over here. It can be difficult to combat the tendency to feel critical and judgmental, even while wanting to fit back in.
- There may be a sense of *guilt* at leaving the field at all when the needs are so great; *anger* with the indifference of folk over here; wanting to *talk* about what one has seen and been through all the time, which can exacerbate the problem of others not appearing to be interested.

The support group needs to be alert and watch for danger signs and ‘be there’ to listen and encourage. Also to pray for the returnees – and with them. They should check that either the sending church or their agency has given them a good debriefing interview or look for the right context for that to occur. The manner in which they are received back (compare Paul and Barnabas at Antioch in Acts 14:21-28) will determine very much how they cope with the re-entry experience.

If the return is permanent and there is no intention to return to the field, there will be a further issue of helping them reintegrate back into life back home. There may have been difficult circumstances surrounding the return, so professional help or counselling may also be needed.

---

<sup>14</sup> Member Care centres exist now in many parts of the world, where debriefing is offered and matters arising from re-entry or other kinds of stress can initially be addressed. Try googling ‘debrief retreat’ to find assistance wherever you happen to be.

<sup>15</sup> YWAM Publishing (1992)

<sup>16</sup> Published by Evangelical Missions Information Service (EMIS) (1987)

On the other hand, if the missionaries' return is just for a few weeks or months of furlough, then they need to be refreshed or re-tooled for further service overseas.

If that is the case, the support group might need judiciously to help plan a good balance between rest, time with family and friends and 'deputation' (going on a speaking tour to represent the ministry). Often the pressure will be on to try and cram in as many speaking opportunities as possible in order to maximise the usefulness of the time at home. It has always been the case that missionaries have been expected to go on deputation during a period of furlough. However, it needs to be borne in mind, that in the old days before the arrival of the jet age, missionaries used to get the rest they needed during the voyage home by sea, which was often weeks if not months in duration. In that time there would be little else to do but eat, rest, read, talk things through with others and pray about burdens and concerns. That meant that, as soon as they docked in the home country, the missionaries would have been quite ready for the challenge of rushing around visiting relatives and/or supporting churches. Nowadays, though, that space for 'decompression' has to be planned for deliberately and ruthlessly, or there may be serious consequences. Getting ready to leave the field, packing up and tying up the details for cover during one's absence can be extremely exhausting. Add to that the disorientation of jetlag and the confusion of re-entry and one has a recipe, potentially at least, for serious trouble. So there needs to be careful planning for 'recharging the batteries' as soon as possible on one's return.

If adults struggle during re-entry, let's not forget that the kids might find it even harder! Their issues will not necessarily be the same as those of their parents and, if anything, can be even more acute. Remember, the adults have taken part in the cross-cultural experience voluntarily, whereas that is often not the case for the children, depending on their age and spiritual standing. Nor are they as equipped psychologically to handle negative emotions and experiences. They may even have been born on the field or barely remember the home culture at all. So whereas for the parents going on home assignment is genuine 're-entry', for the children it may be more like entering a new culture for the first time. Again, there is a generally recognised phenomenon at work here, where kids no longer feel a part of the home culture in consequence of the time they have been away. Yet nor do they feel they 'belong' to the host culture (the people their parents are working with "on the field") because they look and speak differently, and also for a variety of other reasons. So they tend to feel at odds with both worlds and therefore to gravitate towards others who have had the same 'rootless' existence, forming a kind of 'third culture' amongst themselves. These Third Culture Kids have certain recognisable qualities such as adaptability and love of travel and adventure. But on the negative side, there is a tendency to feel like an 'oddball' or a 'misfit', especially in the home or sending culture environment.

I well remember returning to England in 1963 just after Beatle Mania hit the scene and being utterly bemused by the screaming and swooning of girls of my age at the sight of the Fab Four. I remember despising myself for being such a green-horn and not knowing what anything was about and then being angry with my parents and with God for that! In fact my prevailing memory of that period is that of feeling angry and 'out of it' most of the time. You might ask whether that kind of emotion is not shared by most early teenage kids. No doubt it is, but missionary kids have the added burden of feeling utterly different from their peers and of knowing that, however much they try to adapt, that difference may never be erased. Later on, I came to see many of those difficulties in a more positive light – as a preparation for my future life, for one thing. But at the time, my anguish was acute!



In order to support young people who are going through re-entry stress, parents and friends need to allow for feelings like this, not denying or minimising them, but helping them to understand why they feel as they do.<sup>17</sup> It may also be necessary to forewarn the school they will be attending, especially if there are likely to be any special needs or gaps in knowledge due to the curriculum they have been studying. Anything that emphasises their difference from others and makes them stand out in any way will be a cause of real pain, especially at the beginning.

All this will, of course, be even worse, if they have had to return to the home culture on their own to continue their education. Sensitive support from family friends will be even more vitally necessary in this situation. It is no good leaving the ball in their court, though, to get in touch or “come around any time you want”. They will never do that, however much they may long to. They need you to take the initiative towards them, to collect them for a meal at your home or include them in a weekend away with the family or for a shopping spree. It may be necessary to persevere through reluctance on their part – teenagers in particular are highly allergic to being considered a Billy-No-Mates who needs befriending! However, if you can provide a genuinely safe environment for them at such a vulnerable stage in their life, you will have performed a major service to your missionary friends, their parents.

#### IN CONCLUSION

If we are convinced that the role of sending and supporting is as vital as that of going to the mission field, then much needs to change! Yet is it really that impossible to achieve? Another way of looking at the 9:1 ratio of senders to missionaries on the field, is to observe that actually it *only* takes nine in support for one on the field. If churches embraced a specific policy both to release workers and to involve their members, think how many more full-timers could be released, both at home and overseas. If there could just be more genuine ‘senders/supporters’ raised up to be as committed to the task as those whom they are sending, then the challenge that faces us in world missions would become much less daunting.

Very often Ross and I, as we travel and share widely about mission today, meet folk who need the help that has been outlined in this chapter. If *The Antioch Factor* is used by God to mobilise people who are willing to go to the ends of the earth with the gospel, then my prayer is that this chapter will equally help in the raising up of an army (maybe nine for each one serving on the field) of Christians in support groups, who will stand behind them in solidarity and care. What a change we would then see in the work of mission in our generation.

Lord, let it be so.

---

<sup>17</sup> Nowadays there are special retreats being run for returning TCKs in many sending countries. Their value is in giving an opportunity to process ahead of time the likely challenges that will be faced. And especially giving TCKs the chance to interact with each other and hear each other’s stories. They can then keep in touch with one another and become their own ‘support ecosystem’, as it were, as entry or re-entry stress is experienced.

See <https://www.globalconnections.org.uk/events/all>