

Getting with God's Program—Expatriates in International Ministry: A Critical Appraisal from a Missionary Kid/Mission Director by David R. Befus, Latin America Mission, Miami, FL 33152, 2001 (61 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

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Introduction

1. Barriers to Overseas Ministry

... one of the reasons I am writing this short book about international ministry. I hope that it will promote a constructive dialogue about the inner workings of international ministry and address real issues. Let's get the barriers to entry to overseas ministry on the table for discussion. [page 8]

2. Thoughts on International Ministry from Experience

International ministry is complex, and made even more complicated by the simplistic, individualistic, and messianic focus of expatriate ministry promotion that is all the rage today: contradictory statistics, alternative definitions for unreached peoples, windows of different sizes, plus 'blocks' and 'gates' and other categories to choose from. All of this dialogue is accompanied by a wealth of numbers which vary considerably from book to book. How terribly confusing, and perhaps even comical, this must be to the uninitiated! I am hoping that my own thoughts on international ministry, drawn from 26 years of experience, might help to clear up a few things. [Page9]

3. What God Is Doing through Expats

...the key reason for writing this book: *I want to help make it easier for people to consider a radical alignment with what God is doing in the, world through full-time expatriate international ministry.* The goal is to set out in simple terms the basic fundamentals of a great career opportunity: full-time overseas ministry. At the same time, this vocation is presented in the context of a complex environment that should be explained to the prospective expatriate worker. [Pages 9-10]

Chapter 1. The Wonder of Expatriate Service in International Ministry

4. Focus Is on Us

Much of the promotion about "missions" today, as well as much of the advertising of Christian causes, is focused on us, what we can do, and how much we are needed. Reviewing the advertising in a recent Christian magazine, I find that the marketing of Christian schools and seminaries is calling students to schools that promise success, future leadership status, and world class assignments. The subject or focus of the promotion is the student and his own importance.

In the same magazine there are ads to attract donors to causes. One promises those who send in money that they will become part of "a missions revolution." Another allows the donor, as the central player, to "change the life of a child" through a small monthly commitment; another states that a donation will result in a "demonstration of God's power." The person who gives money is central.

We see the same approach in attracting workers to ministry organizations. Statements are made about how one can change the world, or find career fulfillment through ministry. The focus is on the importance of the resource. We are important, we matter, we make a difference.

But the Biblical basis for this is questionable. [Pages 13-14]

5. God's Work Our Focus

God allows us to be part of His work, and His work should be our focus. We take up our small role in time and place. This is our cause. If others also see it as His plan for them, they not only should support it, but should feel fortunate to do so. We are fortunate to join in the outreach, privileged to give to it. May God be central, and be our focus!
[Page 15]

6. Special Place for "Beautiful Feet"

Here is where you and I come in: God *does* let us get involved in His work. This is such a wonderful privilege. To be part of God's work in the world, what could be better than that? And we know also that God has a special place for the "beautiful feet" people that leave their comfortable surroundings to do His work in other places. [Page 15]

7. God Has a Special Role

God has a special role for those sent with the good news, for those who go into all the world crossing geographical, social, and cultural boundaries. Though God does not need us, He does use us in His work. He has special regard for the "beautiful feet" people that go and share the good news. [Page 16]

8. Full-time International Ministry with Pay

Since the time of Christ, only a few were privileged to work fulltime in God's work, outside formal church institutions, because they were working fulltime to support their families.

This makes our opportunity so much more significant: today there are thousands of ways to get involved in full-time international ministry, with pay! There is an accepted concept of "missionary" support, and it is a regular program of many churches in North America and a defined portion of the tithe of many Christians. There are professional institutions that provide channels for financial support, oversight of overseas ministry, personal care for expatriate families, and assistance with fund raising. [Pages 16-17]

9. Openness to Expatriate Involvement in Ministry

Not only is there a mechanism for supporting a full-time expatriate working overseas, but we also live in a world where there is great openness to expatriate involvement in ministry. It is relatively easy to obtain a visa to work in many countries, the U.S. dollar is freely exchanged, and families can generally secure overseas living conditions that allow for a healthy family lifestyle even in the context of international ministry. [Pages 17-18]

10. Ministry Defined In-country

We also live in a time when the definition of what God is doing in the world is articulated by a national church that, in many cases, is inviting expatriate participation in specialized areas of assistance. The definition of tasks no longer needs to be developed in North America, but can be defined out of the context of ongoing ministry in-country, often with a holistic concept of witness that responds to the needs of the poor and with a view to promoting God's kingdom. [Page 18]

11. Working with Nationals

Working with nationals who are taking the good news of God's reign in the world is ever so much more interesting and fulfilling than pursuing the American dream in a cubicle. [Page 18]

12. Fulltime in Christian Ministry with Pay

It just doesn't get much better than that on this side of heaven: work fulltime in Christian ministry with pay, and people praying for you as well. [Page 19]

Chapter 2. The Centrality of the Gospel

13. Change People's Lives through the Gospel

Why is there not greater interest in sharing the gospel with people?

Maybe one key issue is actually a misunderstanding about the Good News. The central purpose of international ministry is to communicate the Good News in terms that people will be able to understand and respond to. This is a very exciting, serious, and worthy goal. The change in people's lives through a relationship with God through what Jesus did on the cross is actually spectacular! [Page 21]

14. Tell the Good News to Anyone – Here or There

Many Christians may not fully understand that they have specific and clear instructions to go and tell the Good News. My father-in-law, a pioneer missionary in West Africa, would laugh when people asked him about his "call" to ministry, and say "we have all been called to 'go,'" I suppose a special call is necessary to 'stay'." [Page 22]

15. “Why do you live like that?”

The life of the Christian should generate the question of "why do you live like that?", providing opportunity to share the "why" they do good and the "why" they do not do evil [Page 22]

16. Loving by Serving

So many people have never really heard the Good News, and a career in international ministry is such a great means of loving others by serving, and thereby giving glory to God. [Pages 22-23]

17. Expats Following in Jesus' Steps

Expatriate workers have a unique opportunity to follow in the steps of Jesus, as described in Philippians 2:5-8, because they are generally going from places of greater wealth to poorer, and giving up many privileges. Some even follow Christ in giving their lives. The "international approach" is the foundation that makes for a good international worker. [Page 23]

18. The Gospel Is Uniquely Good News

When we accept, consciously or unconsciously, the equal validity of all religions, or the commonly stated idea that 'all faiths lead to the same truth,' we forget that the Gospel is uniquely good news. It may seem divisive to state that Jesus "is the way, the truth, and the life," but this is the Good News. [Page 23]

19. Big Opportunity to Share the Gospel

...more than 70% of the population of the world today define themselves as non-Christian, and even part of the remaining 30% supposedly "Christian" truly have not heard the Good News in a way that is understandable to them, there is a BIG opportunity out there for sharing the gospel! [Page 24]

20. Christ As Lord and Taking Up His Cross, not a Part of American Church

Church involvement as part of the good American life contradicts the basic statements about Jesus as Lord (not heavenly employee or entertainer) and taking up our cross and following Him. The heroes of the faith were always those who took up the cross, and success may actually mean a decline in funding, being less popular, and more out-of-step with our culture, especially if it becomes "politically incorrect" to talk about faith. Participation in the Western church can result in a social club religious association, a "Christianity light" that views church membership as just another aspect of the good life. [Page 25]

21. Costs of Following Christ

Perhaps we need to be more open about the cost of following Christ. The concept of "taking up your cross" is not too apparent in the presentation of the Christian message today, nor the idea that His plan requires us to give over to Him all that we have and are. The advertising of ministry assignments in Christian magazines seems to avoid mentioning the costs. One begins "picture yourself in Europe," another says "be a rock," and most use words about impact and results. Some emphasize how "your helping us will help you" and it sounds like the mission exists to serve those who are missionaries. The idea conveyed is that missions will make it easier, take away the problems, make it not only painless but exciting, and also safe to serve God overseas. [Pages 25-26]

22. Discovering the Costs, and Giving Everything

Look at the Hall of Fame listing in Hebrews 11. One of the things the heroes of the faith have in common is discovering the costs, and giving everything. Paul himself, our model, has a similar list of accomplishments in II Corinthians 11:23. Is it not strange that hero bragging rights for the Christian are not based on how much money was raised, nor how big the program was, nor how many came to the church, nor how many people came forward? Bragging rights were based on paying the costs. Paul is our model, as he follows our Lord Jesus Christ. And our Lord's ministry culminated in death on a cross. [Pages 26-27]

23. Give It All Up for a Good Cause

Our cause, worth dying for, requires us to give all that we have and are, and expect trouble. However we present this to outsiders, let us understand and expect that what we do will be costly. Maybe this means work that is no fun, or hours that we would rather be somewhere else, or getting off the career path, or traveling to dirty poor places, or eating strange food, or getting sick, or kidnapped or killed. For new missionaries maybe it means struggling with initial raising of financial support. Big deal! What is this in comparison with the Hall of Famers? And let us not keep the costs a secret, in the competitive environment where one "fulfilling" ministry out-promises another. We should tell potential candidates that this is a place they can give

it all up, for a good cause. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose" said missionary Jim Elliot, killed by the Auca Indians in Ecuador. [Page 27]

24. Short-term Trips Are a Starting Place

In many overseas contexts, the Kingdom message can be presented in a holistic manner, embracing the needs of the full person, just as it was in the first church outreach. It is interesting to note that in the short letter of Paul to Titus, he mentions eight times the idea of "doing good." The Christians were known for how they reached out to help others in need, "a people eager to do what is good," (Titus 2:14) and instructed to "learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives..." (Titus 3:14) In a world where poverty is increasing for the majority in the world, and where opportunities to "do good" abound, the presentation of the Good News of the Kingdom that embraces the whole person, not just the spiritual/future but also the physical /present is very easy to talk about, and something people are anxious to hear about and see. Church outreach integrated with projects to promote health, education, job creation, nutrition, etc. that help people survive seem so much more exciting than entertainment events, theme park trips, and elaborate music/multimedia presentations. When young people from the U.S. go overseas on short-term mission trips they often get their first taste of the joy of integrating Christian witness with programs for helping the poor. It is interesting to note that in the context of short-term service there is little physical comfort and no entertainment, but lives are impacted. Most candidates for career ministry service today get their first taste for overseas ministry from a short term trip where they see lives changed through holistic outreach that, perhaps, would be very difficult to duplicate in suburban U.S. [Pages 29-30]

Chapter 3. The Importance of the Church and National Leadership

25. Church Family Critically Important

International ministry is really a link between God's family in one country and God's family in another. This link generally involves the flow of resources: personnel and financial, and also other resources that travel in both directions. The central role of the church family, on both sides of the geographic divide, is critically important. [Page 35]

26. Coordinate With National Church Leadership

People who work in international programs must coordinate their ministry, to the extent possible, with national church leadership. [Page 37]

27. Start with the National Church

International ministry manuals present proposed stages of missionary activity as: (1) organizing the project, (2) training national counterparts, (3) turning the project over to the national church. A much more healthy modus operandi would be to start the

project with the national church from the very beginning. There are very few areas in the world today without national church presence and local Christian leadership. [Page 37]

28. God Works through Community

For whatever reason, God seems to do things in community, in groups of people working together. Often in the context of a dysfunctional community, ministry projects require working together. [Page 39]

29. Must Work Together

For those united by faith in what Jesus did on the cross to redeem us, who have been drawn into the Kingdom of God and want others to know of what God has done for us, there is no time to bicker, compete, and fight each other. We must work together, and focus on what unifies us, not on what divides. [Page 40]

30. God Uses Differences

What should be noted by potential expatriate workers is that differences between Christian groups in the U.S. often evaporate in ministry overseas. I have sometimes been asked about "what I think of the ministry of X organization," and had to confess that we work directly with them. This may not be good for fund raising, but it is good for Christian outreach, and God even seems often to use our little differences for His glory. [Page 40]

31. Love the Church and Refuse to Work with It -- No

One cannot talk about loving the church and at the same time refuse to work directly with the people that comprise the church. [Page 41]

32. Barriers to Functional Partnerships

Issues of centralized national decision-making, unsatisfactory reporting on finances, or other undesired elements of partnership need to be faced head-on with expectations of tension and written contractual definition. Adequate controls over finances should be required as part of the ministry, and indeed will be a requirement if the local institution is to continue on its own in the future. The tendency of expatriates to prefer warm friendships over honest dialogue is often a critical barrier to functional partnerships.

The exercise of hammering out partnership agreements provides a context for serious dialogue on program vision. The definition of expectations is critical, and should include discussion not only of outcomes, but how they will be reported. For some strange reason, the critical area of finances tends to get left out of these discussions, and should also be addressed directly. It is interesting to note that, when the national church has evidence that it will be responsible for eventual financial support, it often gets much more involved in finding funds for projects. [Pages 43-44]

33. Honesty about Money

Overseas organizations need to be open and honest about money. Foreign workers generally raise their own funds, and make an allowance to provide for a stable family lifestyle but far less than they would make at a comparable job in their home context. In the local context, what they make may put them at middle to upper-class income levels. The idea that the U.S. church should just send the money to employ local workers is not only an impossibility, but creates a different ethos of the employee Christian. [Page 51]

34. Leaders Respected by Peers

The identification of national leadership begins in the same way as the identification of expatriate competence for international ministry, with the question of commitment to the Good News. Is there a genuine commitment to the presence of Christ, and the promotion of His glory? Does the person have credibility in his or her own environment? One of the basic problems of expatriate recruiting and training of leaders is that we tend to choose the type of people that we like, without much reference to whether they are respected by their peers. [Page 51]

35. Local Remuneration Works Best

It helps a lot, in the search for national partners, if national entities considered as partners have no expectation of paid salaries or financial support. National leaders should have a track record of ministry independent of receiving a salary from North America. They must also have a commitment to ministry outreach in their own environment. When national leaders are dependent on expatriate-level pay from international church and para-church agencies, they may represent their national churches in a very different manner than national leaders that receive local remuneration. [Pages 52-53]

35. National Leaders Define Goals

Local ownership is enhanced by local financial support, and the national church should be allowed to give sacrificially not just of its time and people, but also of its finances. The national leadership also must be involved in defining ministry goals, creating tools to measure outcomes, and evaluating project performance." [Page 53]

36. Communicate to Supporters about Co-workers

A starting point is for expatriate workers to communicate to their supporters not only about their work, but about their co-workers. Too often the tendency is to highlight only the work of the expatriate, for fund raising purposes, when in fact the ownership of the project belongs to the nationals. The overseas ministry should be presented as a partnership effort, and the overseas input seen as scaffolding or catalytic. The church in North America is not funding the missionary, they are funding the ministry. [Pages 53-54]

Chapter 4. Strategies for Getting into International Ministry

37. The World Has No Clear Presentation of the Gospel

There are disagreements and conflicting research on international ministry, but one thing is clear: there are over 6 billion people in the world, and most of them have not heard a clear presentation of the gospel. There is a lot to do! [Page 56]

38. Support of Nationals Actually a Salary Subsidy

"If the national church needs help, would it not just be better to send money to the national leaders? Why send people, when sending money seems so much more efficient? There are organizations that promote this. But how it looks, from within the countries themselves, is quite different from how it is presented in the glossy advertising in North America. The advertising says that a new national missionary is contracted for an amount as low as \$30/month. In actual fact, part of this amount, after U.S. overheads, is provided to existing national pastors as a salary subsidy, not as a full-time salary. The net result of this type of funding is not to add ministry workers, but rather to pay existing workers better compensation. If the concept of "missionary" means going to a population different from your own, this program actually does not support missionaries at all. In terms of ministry outputs and results, the person would be in ministry without the subsidy. [Pages 56-57]

39. Professionals Are Still Needed

From a Western perspective, the hypothesis that supplemental payments to full-time national workers is a "cheaper" way to support international ministry also creates the false impression that expatriate involvement is not needed or invited. Professionals called by God to serve overseas may feel like there is no need to go overseas anymore, as the impression is created that the national church can handle this more effectively through donations sent to them directly. In fact, the invitations and opportunities to serve are greater than ever! It is unfortunate if North Americans look at their support for these directly funded programs as a substitute for expatriate missionaries, since they may be complementary, or completely unrelated, to the ministry of full-time professionals sent from North America. [Page 58]

40. God and Make Disciples

God used many ways to communicate with man, including the prophets speaking at many times and in various ways (Hebrews 1:1), but then sent his Son to live with us. There is no substitute, in reaching out to others, *for the international approach of going and living with the people* we want to reach. Jesus did not call us to send money to all the world, but rather to "go and make disciples." (Matthew 28:19) And Paul did not talk about "beautiful wallets," but rather "beautiful feet" [Page 58]

41. Necessary to Take the Time to Establish a Ministry

Language learning, cultural adaptation, and the development of serious personal relationships take at least a year or two, and not much long-lasting ministry can happen without such an investment. The critical need is for long-term people who are willing to take the time required really to live among the people they serve. Short-term involvement actually helps people see this; most full-time expatriates in international ministry get their initial introduction to ministry through a short-term experience.

[Page 59]

42. Great Need for Overseas Full-time Ministry

Though we may want to think about our own ministry outreach in grandiose terms, the average expatriate worker can directly impact the lives of only a few thousand people, even with a lifetime of overseas service. The mathematical implications of this realistic assessment is that there is room for hundreds of thousands of overseas workers, if the Good News is to be communicated to the 6 billion people alive today, and the new ones being born every day. The need for workers far exceeds the available human resources, and this is not new, as Jesus himself comments on it in Luke 10:2. We need to send out workers to the harvest, as He said. The need is so great, may God call more people to work in full-time overseas ministry. [Pages 59-60]

43. Need the God Call

But the issues of need and efficiency are not the foundation for service that gets overseas workers excited, helps them through the tough days, or that motivates them. What expatriate workers tell me, from Sri Lanka to Senegal to Latin America, is that *God has called them* to their work. The need is for candidates *who are called* to international ministry, people who can get excited about encouraging and assisting the national church in world evangelization. [Page 61]

44. International Megachurches Often Are Self-serving

Megachurches that have, in effect, created their own independent international ministries have done so at great expense, and also with significant difficulties overseas, where they tend to lead with money that is available if national churches will copy their U.S. program. Often the megachurch international outreach is more oriented to serving its own short-term programs than responding to the needs of the national church overseas. [Pages 62-63]

45. Professional International Agencies Have Experience

The promotion that churches send out missionaries directly, without using an international agency, often appears to trivialize the concept of international ministry. The North American church often has little experience in international ministry, and though it may aspire to be "like the church in Antioch," what it does not have that existed in Antioch is a diverse, cross-cultural background. Overseas programs supported directly by North American churches, without an international specialist

agency with experience in international ministry, often demonstrate high costs, and poor outputs. The value added of the professional international agency is not just economies of scale in processing support, but also a connection with the local environment built upon decades of experience and a network of contacts with the local church. [Page 63]

46. International Ministry Service

Most candidates for international ministry will need to "raise funds," and often this is a significant barrier to overseas ministry. However, the negative image of this methodology is quite undeserved:

- Young people spend four years in college, and sometimes a year or two in graduate school. Why are they then unwilling to spend one year to develop a financial support base for ministry that they may keep, as a sustainable foundation for ministry, for life?
- The "friend raising" that is involved in creating a financial foundation for ministry is actually development of a church network, a community of people committed to Christian outreach, and is a ministry in itself.
- To have a group that not only funds your ministry, but supports you in prayer, visits your work, communicates with you, and that you can depend on in your home country is such a great blessing! Who else gets this type of spiritual support?
- In a world of continual economic upheaval, where even the big companies show no loyalty to their long-term employees, supported missionaries actually have rather stable employment.

As I speak with recent college graduates in the U.S. I find that many are looking at an uncertain future in cubicles of big companies or even waiting tables in restaurants, while they look for a job. It seems to me that raising support to go with a mission, even if it is just for the period while they are in their 20s and deciding what to do with the rest of their lives, is a very good alternative. Why not serve the Lord in international ministry?

Full-service international ministry organizations are also, comparatively speaking, one of the most efficient vehicles for transferring resources to overseas projects, operating with true to-the field margins of 90% or more. God is at work through these organizations, though they are not well understood or sufficiently appreciated. [Pages 66-67]

Chapter 5. Sustainable Financial Support for Overseas Ministry

47. Best Ministry Projects Are Not Known

There is an interesting irony in financial support and promotion. The best ministry projects are often the ones that no one knows about, because the people who are

implementing the projects are so dedicated to the work that they have no time for reports and pictures. And the projects presented on television, or with glossy colored pictures and heartbreaking stories, are often the less successful, that just happened to be in a good place for the professional marketers to visit and film. Unfortunately, the ability to raise funds for a cause is often equated with God's will, and success measured in terms of fundraising rather than project results. [Page 72]

48. National Worker Replacement Are Greatly Exaggerated

Declarations of how the mission field is becoming the mission force are made with great applause. Were this actually happening at the levels described in promotion, it would be welcome. Unfortunately, much of what is being said is exaggerated. Here again, the statistics are way out of line with reality, and talk about the expatriate from developing countries replacing the decline in North American workers is wishful thinking.

There are missionaries going internationally from developing countries, but if we define full-time professional ministry to mean that a family goes with financial support from its home country that enables it to provide for the family (education of children, health insurance, furlough) and spend full-time in ministry as a career, the 60,000+ (I have seen it as high as 95,000) number of national missionaries cited in the popular literature would probably be reduced by 75% or more. [Page 78]

49. Ministry Costs Money

The problem is, as mentioned at the beginning, that ministry costs money. Many Christians in developing countries are called to overseas ministry, but few have money, or any way to access the necessary funds to work in overseas ministry. The need for viable alternatives, such as professional tentmaking opportunities, may be much more important in these environments than in North America, because there is no other way to support oneself overseas. As we seek to find laborers for the harvest, it is unlikely that they will come from developing countries unless we can find a solution to the financing issue. [Pages 79-80]

Chapter 6. Connecting to the Local Environment

50. Child-raising in Multi-cultural Environment

An ironic benefit of full-time overseas service is to raise your children in a multi-cultural environment. Unlike the U.S. job environment, many missionaries find that they do not have to leave their children in day-care while both parents work each day, but the work environment provides a context for at least one parent to be home. In many overseas environments the children are also not subjected to MTV, television without morals, shopping malls, and other aspects of the U.S. culture that so easily squeeze us into its mold. Living overseas can be a great opportunity for learning to see our own culture, as well as the one we live in. [Page 82]

51. Good News Communicated to Those Struggling Economically

Man was created in God's image, and yet lives in terrible poverty in much of the world today. An awareness of poverty and its causes is also an important consideration of much of the population that international ministry is attempting to serve. The environment for ministry is perhaps more like it was in the time of Christ, where He responded by healing the sick and giving food to the hungry, even as He preached the Good News. The Good News has to be communicated in a context where people are struggling for economic survival, and this is a very different context from North America.

The context of poverty and an orientation toward social and economic development actually are excellent for an expression of the Good News, which originally was delivered in exactly such a context. It should be remembered, perhaps, that the church was not invented in a Western culture, but actually grew up in an environment more like the developing world looks today. The key to working in this environment is a holistic approach to ministry--one that responds to its spiritual and physical needs. [Pages 83-84]

52. Combining Word or Deed

The physical needs of people in the world today offer an opportunity for response, and in so doing, generate the question "why?" Christians motivated by God who loved the world, and who made man in His image, help alleviate ignorance, sickness, hunger, and poverty. They do this even as they contradict the racism, injustice, and other forms of oppression that they find in the environment. Why? For the glory of God, for Christ and His kingdom to reign, even in little areas here and there.

Such an approach is critical in making true disciples, rather than converts with a superficial intellectual knowledge of the faith, because it combines word and deed, as Jesus did. There are actually three additional specific benefits to a holistic approach:

- Ministry requires a social context, a way to get to know people. There is perhaps no better way to begin a personal relationship with someone than to serve them.
- People need to hear the Good News, but cannot hear it well when they are hungry, sick and distressed. Response to their physical need opens the door to addressing their spiritual need.
- As expressed earlier, the ministry is targeted at growing the national church, not at generating superficial reports of conversions. An approach that includes community development creates a much more solid foundation for the local church than evangelistic campaigns targeted at numerical decisions. [Pages 84-85]

53. Overseas Often Easier to Share the Gospel

For those of us who have raised our families overseas, it sometimes seems that the context of poverty is a much easier place in which to understand, communicate and practice the faith. At least it seems easier to integrate word and deed in compassionate outreach in communities. It seems easier for the church to be seen as an expression of the Kingdom of God, rather than have to compete with other "entertainments." This is difficult to communicate to North Americans who are comfortable in their environment. Many international workers become misfits through overseas tenure, and much prefer to raise families overseas rather than in North America. [Pages 87-88]

54. Expect Struggles, Persecutions, and Trials

How should we view ministry in dangerous situations? Many risks were taken by missionary heroes, and sometimes a statement from C.T. Studd is cited: "some like to live within the sound of chapel bell, I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell." The heroes of the faith confronted big problems (Hebrew 11) and "were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised." (vs. 39) Should we not expect struggles, persecution, and trials if we are truly doing the Lord's work? One must be fully conscious of the dangers, and take all precautions. Let us be honest that there is often physical risk inherent in the overseas environment. In responding to God's call and getting with His program, we also are taking on the devil in very difficult situations. [Pages 88-89]

Chapter 7. Making Ministry Projects Successful

55. Finances and Vision

[] there are two basic issues related to a successful project: (1) the financial sustainability of the program over time, and (2) the ability to maintain the vision of the project over time. [Page 92]

56. Going to Hell in Style

The means of reaching people may be programs for health, education, income generation or some other activity, but the end is to share the Good News. Case after case demonstrates that the shift in focus from the end to the means can take place very rapidly. If we help people to be healthier, smarter, wealthier, happier but do not give them the opportunity to know Jesus, do we not run the risk of just helping them go to hell in style? We must remember that the true focus of God's program through ministry is changed lives. [Page 100]

Chapter 8. Three Challenges of this Decade

57. Emphasis on Depth and Long Term

God wants people not only to trust Him, but also to obey. Numerical growth of the church has too often taken place without an emphasis on depth, and we must prepare for the long term, even though we know Christ can come for us at any time. [Page 101]

58. Church Planting Centered on Disciples

If the core objective is to proclaim the Good News, we must be concerned about abuses in the presentation of the gospel. Church planting is based on making disciples, not converts. God is not our heavenly employee, but our sovereign Lord. We are called to follow Jesus in good times and bad, because He is the way, the truth, and the life - this is a faith commitment. [Page 102]

59. Health/Wealth Promotions

Perhaps the most serious aspect of this phenomenon is that people who come into the church through the health/wealth promotion become inoculated to any additional presentation of the Good News. When I listen to the radio and television advertising, I also hear the promises, and they seem to be guaranteed. The easy out when these promises are not fulfilled is to say "you did not have enough faith," but few buy it. They leave the church, and they also close the door to any additional ministry. [Page 103]

60. We Cannot Manipulate God

God can heal, but he does not have to. God can make us prosperous, but how many of us could really handle it if he did? Above all, God is sovereign. He is not our heavenly employee, and we cannot manipulate Him. He owns all the wealth of the world, and we serve at His command. The church was his prescription for how He works in the world today, and functions with the whole body. Leaders are, most of all, to serve. [Page 104]

Chapter 9. Working in Partnership: Theory and an Example

61. Work to Make a Living

We are used to thinking of missionary doctors and teachers, but business and economics can also be a tool for Christian ministry in many contexts. Jesus taught us to pray "give us this day our daily bread," and people want a job, not a handout. Productive economic activity is a means to enhance and support Christian ministry. This phenomenon of "Kingdom business," though relatively unknown, has seen successful implementation in the church since the Apostle Paul first discussed his own work habits in his letters to young churches. He was quite clear that people should work to make a living, but this is not always so easy to do, in a world where poverty and unemployment abound. *Models are needed that combine business with a clear focus on holistic Christian outreach.* They must be integrated with church ministry and a clear emphasis on Christian witness. [Page 118]