

# Ten things to think about before you go

1. Are you conscious of a firm sense of calling? A compassion for people or a desire to do good is not enough. When the going gets tough, as it inevitably will, only a total conviction the God wants you there is enough to see you through. The definition of a call varies from person to person, what matters is the unshakable belief that God wants you there.

2. Are you prepared to lay down your life for Jesus? Quite literally. If you want to be a missions partner, it may cost you your life – are you still sure you want to risk it? Many missionaries are in real physical danger from disease, dangerous animals, poor travelling conditions or even violence. Several of our acquaintances have died on active service. Metaphorically speaking, your calling may require you to sacrifice many things: friends, finance, career, health or maybe even your family. If you're a parent, can you cope with seeing your children sick, or even dying?

3. Are you ready to honour and submit to leaders – even if you think they're wrong? Leaders make mistakes just like the rest of us. Sometimes they're not very good at leading. But that doesn't invalidate their call to be leaders. Good followers need to be able to accept their leaders for who they are, even when they're not perfect, and continue to follow them. That doesn't mean you can't challenge them, but if you can't let them lead, you won't have much of a future as a follower.

4. Does your church support you? The whole church, but particularly the leadership. And not just in thinking it's a good idea for you to go, but in praying for you, financing you, committing to write to you, and even coming to visit you. Being a missions partner is tough enough as it is; without strong church backing it feels like abseiling with nobody holding the other end of the rope.

5. Can you endure hardship without complaining? Life on the mission field will be hard in many ways. It is to be expected. But it is not any easier to cope with if people keep complaining about it, so if you can just shrug your shoulders and get on with life, it will be much easier.

6. Can you live without close relationships? If you're a short-term missions worker, you may not have much time to form deep, supportive relationships no matter how friendly your colleagues are. Deprived of your home friendships as well, you will need to draw a lot on your own resources and may suffer loneliness. Long-termers may find themselves in isolated locations, or serving in an area with no internet support. Can you maintain a vibrant relationship with God in this context?

7. Are you ready to be ill frequently? Missions workers often succumb to a wide variety of debilitating diseases. These can last a long time and leave you feeling weak and discouraged. It can be even worse to see your children repeatedly suffering.

8. Can you share accommodation and live without your own space? Many missions have small, cramped premises. You may be required to share living space. If you're the sort of person who needs a lot of privacy, this could be a big challenge for you. If you're living on a compound, there may be a high security wall around you – although it's there for your protection, it can feel very claustrophobic. If you're the only westerner in the village, get used to people peering in your windows to see how you live, or being constantly followed by a flock of children.

9. Are you prepared to be on call 24/7? There's no such thing as an off-duty missions partner. If you have the only car in the village, you may often be called on to take your neighbours to hospital in the middle of the night. Alternatively, because public transport is unreliable, many visitors arrive late, perhaps just as you're sitting down to dinner. This is particularly demanding on families.

10. Can you entertain yourself? You may be working where there are no cinemas, concert halls or amusement parks, so you might be the only source of entertainment. If you like painting, reading, or going for walks, you might fit in better than somebody who needs a large group of people to have fun with.