

Building a Support Team

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.
Philippians 4:19-20

When we receive a call to missions, we are not called to go alone. We need the help of others who can compliment the call and mission that God has given us. Most of the time we feel the need for financial help, and so focus on seeking that type of support. Those who are more spiritual know that beyond finances, there is a need for prayer support. In fact, the need for prayer outweighs the need for finances. If you have the prayer backing which produces victories, funding will also come.

But there are many other areas of need for support. There are varying statistics that show how many support personnel are needed to sustain one front-line soldier. As we live in a city which hosts several military bases, we are aware that for each soldier on the battle line, there are about 30 support personnel. When we see news clips of soldiers battling in the Middle East and other places, we must realize each soldier is backed by many support personnel who are equally part of the military.

As the Lord of the harvest sends out workers, especially those going to start new works in nations, He plans to link the goers with the senders. We should not expect that everyone is to go. If everyone went, there would be no one to maintain and develop the local congregations that send workers to other fields. In fact, a large number of church members should consider not going but sending. The Biblical basis for being a sender can be found in the following verse: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:13-15)

The Roles Senders Play

Friendship (and senders) are like a ship where we may search together the same horizon; one seeing sky, the other water, where they meet.¹

The following information will help in understanding the role that senders play in supporting those who go overseas as missionaries. It primarily relates to western workers, but others from non-western nations can observe the general principles and adapt the principles to their own situations. The following information was adapted from several sources, one of which was a book by Neal Pirolo called *Serving as Senders*.²

Moral support

There are many challenges and potential discouragements in doing God's work. A great need is for a team of others who can affirm and encourage you. Many times this means being an active listener and just being interested in the worker and the task. Other times it will mean speaking a word of loving truth into the heart of the worker who is faltering, discouraged or tired. "The simplicity of friendship is this: that I know you are there, that somewhere on this crowded planet you and I stand together, if only in a moment of thought. And for those moments and what they bring to me, the world is less empty."³

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

Logistical support

As workers prepare to go to a new location, particularly in a far country, there is great need of those who will help facilitate the details of the move. This spares the individual or team from a lot of distractions that deplete one's energies and take much time. You want to be able to delegate such planning to a trusted in-

¹ Betty Barrett

² Neal Pirolo, *Serving as Senders* (Carlisle, Cumbria: UK: OM Publishing, 1999).

³ Betty Barrett

dividual or team that has some administrative gifts and who can lighten the load during such a strenuous time as moving overseas. Such needs are:

- Taking care of all the cumbersome details the missionaries face, such as the storage of possessions, rent of home, etc.
- Managing business affairs
- Attending personal details such as packing up, etc.

“When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments” (II Timothy 4:13).

Financial support

We believe that it is easier to have someone raise funds for you than for you to do it yourself. It is often difficult to focus on seeking funds for something you feel the Lord wants you to do. Raising funds may not be your greatest ability, so we suggest you pray and look for another who has caught the vision God has given you, and allow them to express their call to the team by generating the interest of others in the task before you. Not only can these people approach others on your behalf, but they can be developing inventive ways to see funding raised on your behalf. The key is to learn to be content in every situation whether you have a lot or a little. That which God has ordained, He will fund. Each member of your team receives the same reward for their faithfulness.

“I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want” (Philippians 4:10–12).

Prayer support

Beyond the normal people who will volunteer to pray for you, there should be people who have been given a divine call and have a heartfelt passion to hold you and the work you are doing before the Lord. We have several such prayer supporters. Some of them are not able to give financially, but they are committed to pray at least once daily for prolonged times. In one instance we met a woman coming out of church who began to cry. She said that God had put a burden on her heart to pray for us. For over six years she has been a major in-

tercessor for us, and we feel that much of the credit for what we do goes to her. Some of the things a prayer support person can do:

- Be a daily prayer supporter for the missionary
- Be a coordinator to organize and stimulate prayer
- Pray for requests common to all missionaries: Adjustment to new culture, language, food, protection in travel, health, dangerous situations, parental concerns for children's well-being, education, friendships, loneliness, homesickness, lack of fellowship, interpersonal relationships, effectiveness in ministry, the people to whom they are ministering and the personal qualities of wisdom, love, compassion, power and self-discipline.

"Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should" (Ephesians 6:19-20).

Communications support

Having someone to post your newsletters and take care of all your communication needs at home is absolutely vital. You appreciate speedy communication when needed. We have had an individual with secretarial skills who was able to print and distribute our newsletter. It was a tremendous help to us, and she felt it was a ministry for her where she was able to use her gifts for God's service in missions. Some needs are:

- Filter e-mail to closed access nation
- Receive communication from the field to compile and process for printing and distribution
- Post newsletter, photos, etc. to be seen by family and church (with discretion)

"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you" (Philippians 2:19).

Re-entry support

This is a very important ministry that will greatly help you when you return home. You may feel disoriented with re-entry culture shock. Having someone to guide you through your re-entry and help you re-adjust is extremely benefi-

cial. Going grocery shopping and making numerous decisions on what to buy for a few meals can cause a lot of stress to an already tired missionary. How to help:

- Provide personal, self-contained housing
- Provide meals when necessary
- Line up meetings
- Understand the adjustments that the missionary will face
- Go shopping with them to a supermarket

“On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples” (Acts 14:27–28).

How to Build a Support Team

I am carried on the shoulders of those who cannot see
the landscape I describe. I owe them far more
than my weight.⁴

Psalm 90:17 says, "May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us, establish the work of our hands for us – yes, establish the work of our hands." Note that it is together that God will establish the work of our hands. We need others to be part of our support team. The members of your team receive the same reward you receive for their faithfulness. We encourage you to begin building a support team today. Don't wait or procrastinate. It takes time and effort. Paul was one who always realized the importance of his support team and their partnership in the gospel with him. He would always thank them and pray for them with joy.

“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayer for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (Philippians 1:1–5).

⁴ Ibid.,

Ways to Build Your Support Team

- Develop a spiritual resume – Be faithful with the little things that are before you right now. Bear fruit in your life in your present position. People will support those who have a proven track record.

“It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth” (III John 3).

- Write a newsletter – Once you have a database developed, begin to write a newsletter. At this point in your life, you may not know everything the Lord wants you to do. Most of us never do. You will want to tell these individuals what you are sensing, and then ask them to pray for you. As they pray for you, the Lord will begin to speak to them. Realize that these individuals will help you succeed through their prayers, encouragement, timely words and counsel.

“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed. A man finds joy in giving an apt reply – and how good is a timely word” (Proverbs 15:22–23).

- Pray – Tell the Lord what you need, and ask Him to build a sending team around you. Believe that God will answer your prayers. When God has called you overseas, He will provide all that is necessary to meet your needs for serving Him there.

“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (Mark 11:24).

- Wait – Depending on where you are presently in your spiritual life and call, you may have to wait a longer or shorter time before you actually are set upon the field for a prolonged period. In your heart, practice quiet confidence in the Lord, and thank Him that He has been designing you to do good works for which He is fully preparing you that you should walk in

them.

”Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary” (Isaiah 40:31, NASB).

Missions does not just focus on those who go. Those who serve as senders are equally significant. If anybody knew about going on missionary journeys and needing a support team, it was the apostle Paul. He said, “...and how can they preach unless they are sent?” In Romans 10, he established the vital importance of cross-cultural outreach on these two levels of involvement: Those who go and those who serve as senders.⁵

⁵ Neal Pirolo, *Serving as Senders* (Carlisle, Cumbria: UK: OM Publishing, 1999).