

## 14 Things Your Missionaries Might Like to Tell You, but Feel Inhibited

When Paul and Barnabas returned home from their journey, they “gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27). Your church’s missionaries periodically pay you a brief visit. They will tell you about their successes and failures, and thank you for your support.

*There are things your visiting missionaries might wish to tell you but feel they cannot:*

**When we’re visiting you, we haven’t actually “come home.”** We live elsewhere, and are temporarily visiting the place where we used to live. Especially for missionary kids, “home” is far from here. We are usually keen to get back to where we belong.

**Don’t assume that we are up to date on all the latest U.S. culture.**

**We are aware that we look older-heavier-greier-balder than the last time we passed through town.** Everyone at your church does, too, but it’s basic courtesy not to mention it!

**Don’t spend our short time together telling me about friends who have taken vacations in our country of service.** Like you, we just want to be listened to, and we hope you’ll ask us about how we minister in our country.

**Please remember to bless our children.** Missionary Kids (MKs) have given up their culture, language, pets, friends, relatives to go to the field. If you give them some treat while we’re visiting your church, even a simple one, your thoughtfulness will be remembered for years to come.

**Our children are probably not sullen; they’re shell-shocked.** They travel hundreds of miles and visit dozens of groups. They think and they dream in two languages. They don’t remember who you are. Still, they’ll probably be approachable so long as you smile and make no sudden moves.

**We may be able to host a short-term team from your church. But then again, maybe not.** Hosting a team takes months of planning. Imagine if a dozen foreign teenagers dropped by your home in America; they can’t speak the local language and they are more excited about going to Six Flags than they are about the mission. If you want to arrange a trip, have a clear goal, defined tasks, and sound financing and you’ll be welcomed back.

**Missionaries believe in missions, in fact, many of us support other missionaries.** You might suppose that since we have already “given all”, we feel no obligation to donate to missions or

the local church. In fact, the missionaries I've asked report that they support other missionaries as part of their contribution to God's work.

**Don't try to convert us to Multi-level Marketing (MLM) instead of traditional support-raising.** We've already heard the tale of the new missionary who stood outside a factory gate and within an hour raised 100% of his support by recruiting people to Amway. And while some of us are "tent-makers," using our work in another country as an entry for the gospel, that is not feasible for others of us.

**We have worked hard to calculate the minimum necessary we need to live on the field.** In many countries, the cost of living is much higher than in the US. We are also concerned that you wouldn't understand the decisions we have made with our mission agency.

**Don't tell us we should re-negotiate the percentage that our missionary agency charges us, because you think they're ripping us off.** If we pay 13% to our board, it's because of a slate of services that they render. If you make the generous offer to manage our affairs for nothing, please don't be offended if we turn you down. The truth is, you could not possibly handle the business, insurance, retirement plan, communication, promotion, mobilization – let alone evacuation in the case of earthquake or revolution, or knowing what to do if we're kidnapped – that the professionals can, nor do it decade after decade.

**No, we DON'T think the US church faces a relatively high degree of persecution.** Not even if the cashier at the drugstore did tell you "Happy Holidays!" instead of "Merry Christmas!"

**Working in a new language is really, really hard.** Yes, you picked up some Spanish from your vacation and can say, Por favor, ¿dónde está el baño? But could you say: The doctrine of justification by faith alone, a hallmark of the Reformation, runs counter to your notion that attendance at Mass is a channel for divine grace? And contrary to a popular myth, an adult can't pick up a new language just like children do. There are scientific reasons for this: a child is hardwired to learn grammar, but past age 6 or 7, you can no longer learn a language so naturally. If we're studying, for example, Arabic or Turkish, we will need years to become reasonably conversant.

**We are Christians, not super-Christians.** We do not have a special hot-line to God. We sometimes doubt our calling, and wrestle with questions of significance. In terms of basic emotional and spiritual needs, missionaries are like everyone else. The majority of missionaries do not return after their first year of service; so at any given moment, some of us are considering coming back from the field. We might welcome a chance to share in confidence what's really going on with us.

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