COVID-19 AND A MISSIONARY CALL

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Category: Observations

How have you been getting on during lockdown? Have you settled into a new routine, faced up to changes in your work and church environment and just got on with things or are you desperate to get back to normal?

If my social media feeds are anything to go by, a lot of people fall into the latter category. Some can't wait to get back to church as normal, others are desperate to see their families, and there are those who are longing to get back to the restaurant/gym/pub or whatever.

The thing is, if this is how you are reacting to lockdown, you might want to reconsider any idea you have about being a long-term missionary.

Let me explain.

Although it may not be obvious, there are some clear similarities between life in the UK under lockdown and life as a long-term, cross-cultural missionary. In both cases, you can find yourself far from friends and family, without any idea of when you will see them again. You can't attend services at your home church, but have to worship in a very different and, perhaps, strange cultural context. In order to thrive and minister in mission, you have to fully embrace your new context and this inevitably involves giving up things that are important to you. Mission work may involve you not seeing your friends, family or home church for years at a time, rather than just months under lockdown. If you are constantly looking forward to the time when you can go home/get back to normal, your ability to minister and thrive will be considerably compromised.

Mission work involves being able to make yourself at home in a new culture, without perpetually wishing that you were back at home. To be honest, if you are struggling to cope with lockdown, where you still have so many familiar things around you, having to do a lot of adjusting while learning a new language, may well be a struggle.

Obviously, there are a few things that don't work in this analogy. Being called by God and commissioned by a church for a lifetime of mission is somewhat different to living in a lockdown imposed by a government in response to a virus. Also, I'm certainly not saying that it is wrong to miss your family, friends and church - to do so would be very wrong.

However, the underlying issue of how you react to changed and stressful conditions is an important one. If your natural reaction is to look to the future when things will get better, then you are less

likely to thrive in mission work than someone who just settles down and makes the best of a changed situation.