RISKY BUSINESS

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Churches, agencies and individuals involved in mission work have to deal with the fact that mission involves putting people in harm's way. If we can't cope with that, then we should do something else.
Category: Christian Life

A few days ago, I wrote a blog post about the fact that we follow in the steps of a crucified Lord and what this means for us as Christians. The bottom line is that, despite what the TV preachers tell you, suffering and persecution are normal in the Christian life. The Bible is pretty clear on this.

This is sometimes thrown into harsh relief in the world of mission. It's not that missionaries are special people - they have all of the strengths and weaknesses of the population at large - but they can find themselves in some tough situations. Take the apostle Paul for example.

> *Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not.Â I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. (2 Corinthians 11:24-27)*

I don't think I know any individualÂ who has managed to go through everything on Paul's list, but everything that Paul mentions has been experienced in one way or another by my friends and colleagues.

Mission is by its very nature a risky business.

This has implications both for churches and agencies who send out missionaries and for the individuals themselves.

All charities in the UK have to compile an annual register of risks and they must demonstrate what measures they have in place to mitigate those risks. To be honest, I'm not sure how you mitigate the risk to someone sharing the Christian message in the Middle East, or running Women's education programmes in the highlands of Afghanistan. The only way to avoid risk altogether is not to do them.

Of course, churches and agencies have a responsibility to care for their people. Those going to especially dangerous places need specialist training to handle the situations they are likely to encounter and thy must have good contingency planning in place to handle emergencies. The three month training course we took in Cameroon may have seemed like an indulgence; but when we were a long way from medical help and the kids had malaria, it was good to have some knowledge of what to do.

Another issue for agencies and churches is liability. In our increasingly litigious society, it is not impossible that an agency or church could be sued if one of their missionaries come to harm in

some far flung place. I don't know of any examples of this happening in the UK so far, but there have been examples in the US. This adds a further layer of complexity to issues that were always difficult.

To me, one of the most frustrating things about mission communication is that some of the best stories about what God is doing in the world today can't be told because they would put people's lives in even more danger than they already are.

Individuals need to realise that mission (or following Jesus in any walk of life) is a risky business. There probably isn't too much danger in a summer mission trip to the South of France (beyond sunburn, that is), but taking the gospel to places where people haven't heard about Jesus can involve significant personal risk. This is par for the course.

I was saddened recently, to read an article on the CMFÂ blogÂ that touches on the issue of risk. The article is about changes to NHS treatment for missionaries (you can find a rather more thoroughÂ view here). Noting that it is *possible* that NHS treatment *may* not be available to some missionaries in future (though it will still be possible to obtain insurance that will cover the shortfall), the CMF blog concludes as follows:

> *However, this may be one more uncertainty, along with changes in career structure and revalidation, that may bring missionary doctors home early or deter them from setting off in the first place.*

Can I gently say to any potential missionary doctors, Bible translators, evangelists or whatevers, that if possible changes to the NHS are a reason for you to consider not going overseas, then it is much better that youÂ stay at home. We are called to follow in the footsteps of a crucified Lord and good medical provision and a reliable career structure were never promised as part of the package.

Churches, agencies and individuals involved in mission work have to deal with the fact that mission involves putting people in harm's way. If we can't cope with that, then we should do something else.

> *As they were walking along, someone said to Jesus, â€œI will follow you wherever you go.â€*
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> *But Jesus replied, â€œFoxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head.â€*
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> *He said to another person, â€œCome, follow me.â€*
>
> *The man agreed, but he said, â€œLord, first let me return home and bury my father.â€*
>
> *Â But Jesus told him, â€œLet the spiritually dead bury their own dead! Your duty is to go and preach about the Kingdom of God.â€*

> *Another said, â€œYes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family.â€*
>
> *But Jesus told him, â€œAnyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.â€ (Luke 9:57-62)*