

FUNDAMENTALS FOR FRUITFUL LONGEVITY IN MISSION

By: Dick Brogden

1) Abide in Jesus

Abiding is both a discipline (a fixed, regular, morning time before the day begins) and a state (communing with Jesus, the Father, and the Spirit all day long, listening always, praying always, obeying immediately). Both the discipline and the state of abiding needs to be developed, cultivated. Truly without Him we can do NOTHING. (John 15)

Interestingly, a key definition of “abide” is to hold steady, to not give way, to remain. There is a “Don’t quit!” component to abiding, an endurance, a perseverance even when things get tough, a resolve to finish what you start. Tough days will come, tough people will drive you crazy, missionaries who make it honor their commitments no matter how hard it gets. We WILL finish language school. We WILL finish the term. We WILL stick it out as our team navigates growing pains. We resolve to endure, and to do it with joy, not just teeth clenched grit.

2) Learn Language and Culture

There is no shortcut to fruitful mission, and while there are missionaries that have done well without learning language fluently, every one of them would testify they did well DESPITE not learning language and culture. Every one of them would agree that learning language only adds to effectiveness, it does not diminish. Language capacity for the wife is just as critical for the husband, wives and mothers who do not learn language do not tend to last long.

It is important to stay positive about your host culture. Remind yourself of the things you love about your context. Ensure weekly contact, fight against isolation - living near but not with host peoples. Watch your anger level (traffic!) and don’t fight what you can’t change. Keep tabs on your negative attitude against what is fallen in the host culture - guarding your motivations so they stay faith filled and hopefully, not cynical and bitter. Keep your sense of humor. Lighten up...bend...relax. Workers that last, learn to make peace with the target culture and be content with one’s circumstances. Long serving workers learn to enjoy bi-cultural living, they can shift back and forth from their home culture to their host culture, recognizing that both are equal in value and when appropriate, fully embraced and enjoyed without any sense of guilt.

One of the best ways to learn something is to teach it. Pass on what you learn. Teach your children, your peers, your team. Learn to pass on what the Lord shows from the word. Memorize the text and reference so you can teach it again and again (in churches, to converts, to colleagues, to children).

3) Take Responsibility for Your Own Missiological Development

While it is appropriate to be thankful for any investment in your missiological development - whether by leader, mentor, or team - you cannot depend on others to spoon feed you. You must read missiology books, ask questions, seek out input from

other organizations and fellow workers. Missiology is best learned in a helix that starts with Biblical Theology and then mixes theory and practice. Learn by a blend of study and application, evaluation, and adjustment. Build a circle of thinkers around you that you will share books, ideas, and challenging thoughts. Read the history of your cultures so that you become more a part of it. Visit the key locations of your field as a cultural explorer.

4) Raise Adequate (+) Support

Well funded missionaries stay on the field longer. Money is a tool and it can be used wisely. Missionaries with strong work accounts and steady personal support tend to last longer on the field. They can afford practical things like conferences and holidays, they can contribute to ministries, they can add amenities (not luxurious) that help over the long run - simply things like an air conditioner in a bed room, or a mattress better for the back - practical things that add up over time.

5) Understand the Mission System and Be Timely/Prompt in Responses and Filing Reports

Organizations have cultures, and those cultures morph over time. It is critical to learn the system, work flow, how approvals are sought for and granted, how decisions are made, who are the stakeholders and gatekeepers, how information is processed, how ideas are vetted. All these processes take time and are complicated by personalities in leadership positions. Time spent learning how to wisely, honestly, and graciously navigate the system is priceless. It is also important to respond to leaders and colleagues as quickly as possible and to meet deadlines on reporting and responding.

6) Spank Your Kids

Children that run families, eventually run them right off the field. Those who discipline their children and run an orderly household last longer on the field. Understanding that some cultures no longer endorse spanking, it is yet a Biblical principle that a spared rod leads to a spoiled child. A spoiled child leads to shortened service on the field. From birth, babies can be disciplined, trained that parents lead the family, and schedules of the children are formed by what is best for them and the family -not by the whim or manipulation of the child.

7) Ask a Lot of Questions, Don't Ask a Lot of Favors

It is imperative that we ask many questions to leaders, peers, and friends. It is doubly imperative that we ask in the right spirit (genuinely to understand, not to find fault or to be a critic). Asking questions to make leaders or colleagues look bad or to make yourself look good are unhelpful. Asking questions to learn from their experience is wise and prudent. Those that ask good questions avoid common pitfalls and major mistakes and last longer on the field. Asking a lot of favors (exemptions, allowances, privileges, etc.) does not help you long term on the field. If you develop the attitude (and the reputation) of always wanting favors, your leaders will eventually start saying no to you, even if the request is appropriate as you will have fatigued them with your appeals. Make it hard for your leaders to say no to you - do this by very seldom asking

favours. Leaders love to reward those who are not needy or always asking for exceptions.

8) Submit to Authority - And Like it.

It is one thing to submit to authority externally and bitterly grumble on the inside, it is another thing to revel and rejoice in being submitted to authority. Those who only obey (without rejoicing in the obedience) can only sustain that external concession for a while. Eventually the dissonance between external compliance and internal defiance will be too great to sustain and you will leave the field. Those that choose to submit to authority (even flawed authority) and rejoice in that submission -can endure all kinds of leaders (good and bad) and endure on the field.

Learn to submit to national authorities (whenever morally possible) and to local believers, learn to submit to leaders of national churches wherever it is possible and prudent to do so. Make it a habit to pray for those in authority over you. Know the difference between commitment and surrender. "Commitment can mean you are still in the driver's seat, determining where and how you are going to be committed, but surrender means getting out of the driver's seat." -James Bradford

9) Exercise and Eat Right

We are integrated beings and God is mocked when we do not exercise regularly or eat moderately. Many missionaries leave the field because of health issues that manifest over time, that result from long term abuse. Exercise is also a primary stress reducer - releasing harmful toxins from your body. Eating well, sleeping well, and exercising well play a huge role in missionary longevity. Cultivate meaningful hobbies - discover activities that enable your spirit to enjoy God's creation. Music, reading, food, sports, games, or other sorts of human inquiry help us equilibrate our daily lives.

10) Honor the Sabbath -Weekly, Date Night, Family Vacations, Prayer Retreats

Pace of life is critical in mission. The stress we accumulate is unmatched in almost any other profession - language stress, culture stress, rejection stress, security stress, organization stress et. al. accumulate incessantly on us. Those that are faithful in weekly sabbath learn to run a marathon. Date nights, regular family vacations, and prayer retreats may seem extravagant, but they contribute to families remaining on the field over decades - and having positive experiences and memories that last all life long. In some extreme contexts, it is advisable to leave your county/context for a vacation every 6 months.

11) Build Relationships outside of a team (CBB, MBB, ExPat)

Even the best, most functional teams have a tendency to insularity. In fact, the better the team is, the greater the tendency to be ingrown - for so many needs (missiologically, relationally, leadership, fellowship, etc. can be met in team). Long serving missionaries intentionally reach outside of their teams (whether that team is expat or local) towards the wider body of Christ. We make it through the decades of missions service through interdependence on God's team.

12) Have an Accountability Partner

The best accountability partner is not your wife (even if that is your primary accountability partner) but a same gender colleague who lives in the same location as you do and can meet with you every week - eye ball to eye ball. Some missionary service is cut short by tragedy or health or financial pressure or discouragement, but other missionary service is cut short by sin. Confession of vulnerability and need, the informed prayers of colleagues who are not enamored with you, and the hasty bringing of “early” sin into the light - can propel missionaries to long term service. Practice the spiritual disciplines in community whenever possible.

Accountability works best in the context of friendship. Workers who last are vulnerable with their fellow workers and friends. They make time to play, laugh, and have fun together. They share holidays, move furnitures, and spontaneously eat ice cream together. As they embrace their “new family,” they are free to talk about their core philosophies and emotions because they have created a safe environment and have people who will love them in the ups and through the downs. Fun and laughs have opened many doors for intimate conversations for us over the years. Love and laughter plough the hearts.

13) Memorize Large Swaths of Scripture

The word of God is the best cure for errant thinking - whether that thinking is sensual, critical, arrogant, misguided, or self-deluded. The word of God is the best content for prayer, preaching, discipleship, and evangelism. The word of God is a lamp, a sword, a tower, and a comfort. The word of God sustains us as we ingest and regurgitate it on a daily basis. Memorizing the word of God provides renewal and refreshing which sustains long term missions. Memorizing scripture in the local language is also an important aid in long term service as it increases potency of the ministry among local believers and pre-converted.

14) Pray in the Spirit Every Day

Praying in the Spirit is a key component of spiritual warfare and of building up the inner person. There is so much demonic activity around us that manifests in verbal ways, and we need to fight fire with fire. In Islam, for example, Koranic chanting on taxi radios or from mosque minarets is the Islamic equivalent of praying in the Spirit. The Muslim for the most part does not understand the archaic Arabic of the Koran but is emotionally moved by the chanting. Speaking in tongues (praying in the Spirit) does not center in cognitive understanding (though the will is certainly not bypassed) but on cooperating with the Spirit as He prays through us. When the Spirit prays through us, it opposes (and overcomes) the demonic prayers and utterances that are all around us. Spiritual attacks, oppression, accumulated darkness, soul weariness, and despair are all countered by praying in the Spirit. Burdened and weary missionaries do not last. Missionaries who inner person is daily renewed endure and abide.

15) Build Bridges within Community and with Other Organizations

A surprising aid to longevity is when your internal rolodex includes all kind of practical connections. Embassy officials, plumbers, carpenters, lawyers, politicians, religious

leaders, civic gatekeepers, educators, vets, coaches, men and women of influence, authorities of every nature all in one way or another help us stay. It usually takes missionaries 8-10 years to develop the social networks that provide a platform for long term ministry. There are resources and donors and educational ministries that love to partner and can contribute in significant ways to endurance and perseverance and credibility and capacity in long term service.

16) Develop a Biblical Model of Decision-Making

Decisions are the fruit of beliefs, not feelings or circumstances. Discernment requires a combination of core principles, trusted counselors, prayer, intentional reflection of what the Word says and trust in God's leading.

17) Adopt a Lifestyle of Servanthood

Ask the Spirit to build humility and joy in your efforts to meet people in their needs. Serving team members, neighbors, national churches and your own family is the most practical expression of a Christ-like spirit that will protect us from entitlement attitudes which build resentment.

18) Practice worldly detachment

Simplistic living is a healthy view of material things, therefore, by intentionally living with fewer accretions I have more time to spend with God and others. I also will not build greater separation between neighbors, believers, teammates, and myself. I can leave the unessential because my life is in focus with eternal goals. Employ the gift of deferred gratification. This gift has been used regarding sex, money (disciplined giving and saving) and rank or position.

19) Learn to Resolve Conflict Biblically

Learn to pray and live the mercy prayer. Own responsibility. Acknowledge mistakes and refuse to blame others for your faults. Refuse to live offended. Practice what the Lord taught us to pray; "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." - Matthew 6:12; Forgive and move on! Live a repentant life, be quick to apologize.

20) Revisit Your Call and the Big Picture Purposes of God Regularly

Regularly share your testimony: how you came to Christ, how the Lord drew you into missions, and other special times when you knew the Lord ministered to you personally. Make/take opportunity to share with other workers, neighbors, and supporters as reminders of God's faithfulness. Remember the first love, the love that compelled you to surrender your heart to say "Yes I will go where you want me to go" (with no strings attached). This tenderness and love sustains you in joy and heartache when so far from family and home country.

21) God's Sovereignty

At the end of the day, there are three critical components that help us stay in the countries (and among the peoples) God has led us to. The first and foremost is **God's Sovereignty**. God is all powerful and He can overcome all accusations, threats, and

dangers. Second is **relationship with people of influence**. When you have powerful friends in society, community, or government - they can often help you stay in country when some angry minority wants you to leave. Third is **perceived good vs. perceived bad in the eyes of the community**. If you have served the community well, you have a higher probability of remaining in the country in times of duress. For example, if your Muslim neighbor finds a Bible under the pillow of his daughter that she confesses you gave her, and he takes it the neighborhood leader in anger, that leader may like you but even so he needs some reason to defend you. If that local leader can say: "Yes, this is a problem, I don't like his missionary activities either, but the water I just served you is from the well he helped us dig, your kids and mine are right now in the school he helped us start, and your wife and mine are with his wife at literacy class even as we speak. I don't like that he is sharing his faith, but he loves us, visits us when we are sick, speaks our language, wears our clothes, and celebrates our joys and mourns in our sorrows. I don't like what he has done in giving your daughter a Bible, but he is a good man and we should let him stay."

About the Author

For the past twenty-two years, Dick has lived and worked among Muslims in Mauritania, Kenya, Sudan, and Egypt. He is the founder of Khartoum Christian Center and two initiatives to provide educational training for business development: Aslan Associates (Sudan) and iLearn (Egypt). He is also the founder of EDOSS, an NGO that helps the illiterate poor and refugees in Darfur, Sudan. He is the author of *Saharan Siftings* and *Loving Muslims*; he is the editor of *Desert Rain*, *The Live Dead Journal*, and *Live Dead the Journey*.

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