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**Special Considerations**

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Now that you are well into [The](http://www.thenextmile.org/ezine-signup/) Next Steps Series, I am sure you realize that your short-term ministry experience impacted you in far greater ways than you ever imagined it would.  Life and relationships feel differently than before you first landed in your short-term ministry location.  In fact, you may even grasp that it is not merely your perspectives that have changed, but you have changed, e.g. a deeper, even different kind of walk with the Lord, life values – purposes - priorities, and even what’s next for your life because you want it to count for eternity. You might even be asking the Lord if missions as a career is what He has in store for you.  It’s a humble question, one that I myself didn’t consider up until the end of our two-year short-term experience. It’s a question that the answer may seem daunting to you but it is one that is answered in simple but authentic faith, step by step.

As a result of your short-term ministry experience, it is normal for you to consider that a missions career may be in your future. You’ve caught and understand what God’s mission is and you want to know if it is in cross cultural ministry that He is leading you towards. Apart from the skills and abilities you would bring to the mission field, there are aspects of your life that most mission agencies will want to know about and evaluate your fitness for serving long-term. In short, these aspects focus on your health: your personal relationship with the Lord and how you feed yourself spiritually, your relational health, your family health, your financial health, and your physical health. Your health in these areas will impact your ability to serve and minister to a world desperately in need of a Saviour.

Your personal relationship with the Lord and how you feed yourself spiritually determines to a large extent how you live a life transformed by Jesus. As you learned from your short-term experience, cross cultural living probably revealed some things to you about your life that need to be addressed and changed. So, how are you going about learning from and allowing the Holy Spirit to change you in those areas? What forms of worship and study disciplines reveal how you feed yourself from God’s Word, submit to Him in private prayer and fellowship with others in corporate worship? I highly recommend that you consider asking someone to spiritually mentor you in this area.  Rest assured, mission agencies are not looking for perfection but are instead looking for lives devoted to Christ and being transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Interpersonal relationships unquestionably create the most stress in a missionary’s life. Your willingness and ability to humbly move towards ambiguity, conflict and doubt with fellow missionary colleagues is essential. It is one of the most profound areas of need for the Holy Spirit to lead and work among missionaries as they submit to one another. At the same time, your willingness to address the same areas of ambiguity, doubt and conflict in cross cultural relationships is an additional challenge but necessary to ensure healthy interpersonal relationships.  What did you learn from your short-term ministry experience in this area and what do you need to commit to the Lord to teach you in this area? Your debriefing process probably revealed some direction for you to pursue in this area.

How does your family feel about your considering a missions future? Honour them by asking for and receiving their responses. Remember, that their responses may come over a period of time and not just during one conversation. This is as much a process for them as it is for you. The most important thing you can do is to welcome their questions. Be sensitive to and respect their concerns.  Give them as much information about what God is doing in your life and the possibility of Him leading you to cross cultural ministry.  Don’t forget, you’ve been there - done that, and the only picture or idea your family may have in their mind about you living in another culture is what flashed across their TV on CNN.

If you are married, how are you and your spouse debriefing your short-term experience? How are your perceptions and feelings the same and/or different? What conclusions from your previous experience do you feel ought to be considered in understanding the Lord’s leading about your future? Are you on the same page?  Are you talking about the pros and cons, your dreams and fears, and are you listening to one another?  I encourage you to share these things with a mature couple or individual who cares for you and can give you feedback to what they observe and hear from you in these areas.

Missionary support packages vary among mission agencies.  These differences are primarily based upon agency philosophy and reflected in salary, services and benefits provided.  You will want to choose an agency with which you are comfortable and feel that your needs are met satisfactorily, regardless of how it compares to other agencies. Many mission agencies require that career applicants have no consumer debt.  Many agencies, however, will allow you to have educational debt, as long as you are able to pay the debt down from your monthly stipend.  Agency websites often have this kind of information. Check them out.

Your physical health will directly impact your ability to perform the required ministry tasks on the mission field. Climate, elevation, rural vs. urban, availability of certain foods will all impact how you are able to function.  Ministry placement location may be determined by your having guaranteed access to a pharmacy if you are regularly taking a required prescriptive medication. Physical limitations such as obesity, allergies, diabetes can be factors that determine whether or not you can perform the ministry tasks required by your agency. Habits crafted in the areas of eating well, resting well and exercising well are essential to your being up for the physical demands of cross cultural living and ministry. These are matters that you may want to talk over with a health professional.