

Dangerous Shortcuts

Beware of hazardous missions temptations

by Ellen Livingood

Shortcuts are so tempting. We all like to find easier ways to get things done. But shortcuts often don't deliver what they promise. Some shortcut failures are harmless; others are devastating.

Missions shortcuts can be dangerous too. And harm may come despite our best motives. When Jesus sent His disciples out on their first missions assignment, He warned them to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Mt. 10:16). Wisdom involves avoiding temptations to take dangerous shortcuts. Here are seven to consider.

① Mobilizing without discipling

The worthy goal: Getting more workers into the harvest

The dangerous shortcut: Focusing on potential workers' "going" without "being." We have fast-forwarded too quickly to recruitment instead of making long-term investments in the church's essential role of developing godly character and ministry skills.

Where the shortcut has taken us: Church leaders, missionary field supervisors, and global church leaders are expressing growing concerns about the lack of maturity, biblical foundation, and readiness of too many of those being sent into missions from the West. There are stellar new workers who are trained and equipped for missions, but far too many others are not.

Getting back on the road: If the Western church wants to raise up another generation of dedicated senders as well as effective goers, we will need to focus much of our energy on long-term discipleship.

Rather than trying to get to the field faster, many Millennials need to get



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there more slowly. In-depth internships can confirm gifting and prepare them for global ministry. The best programs include mentoring as well as character foundations, ministry and teamwork skills, and more. Some churches can provide excellent in-house internships, but many need to search out practicums in local ministries, domestic internships focused on diaspora (ex: [Int'l Project](#)), educational programs incorporating extensive internships (ex: [Bethany Int'l Univ](#)), and global internship options (ex: [Horizons Int'l](#)).

2 Making missions giving easy



The worthy goal: Inviting our people to take small steps in financial involvement

The dangerous shortcut: Inadvertently communicating that a token contribution fulfills missions responsibility, or relying on guilt or pity to stimulate one-time giving to a cause

Where the shortcut has taken us: Believers can think that easy responses, like filling a shoebox, justify lavish spending on themselves. Or that a one-time response, like making a small contribution after hearing a trafficking story, fulfills their Great-Commission responsibility. The activities may be valuable, but allowing believers to use an “easy out” to avoid sacrificial living/giving is unbiblical.

Getting back on the road: We must call people to true discipleship that rejects the assumption that Christians have a right to be comfortable and safe. Risk and sacrifice are at the heart of Jesus’ call to discipleship: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mk. 8:34). This applies equally to living, to giving, and to going.

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3 Avoiding saying “no” or “no longer”



The worthy goal: Encouraging those God has called to missions service

The dangerous shortcut: Allowing people to self-select for missions, i.e. assuming that everyone who claims, “God is calling me,” has correctly interpreted God’s leading; or allow-

ing workers to remain in a role no longer needed or for which they are no longer qualified as the context changes

Where the shortcut has taken us: No church would unquestioningly accept someone walking in and announcing, “I believe God has called me to be your pastor.” Yet often churches accept an individual’s declaration that “God has called me to be a missionary” without prayerfully seeking consensus that the church (both “here” and “there”) also believes this is true.

Getting back on the road: In Acts 13:1-3, God clearly sets a precedent for speaking to church leaders about whom to send. Churches must rigorously practice leader-driven sending. Also, in today’s fast-changing global environment, questions of gifting and fit need to be asked repeatedly by both agency and church, and the myth dispelled that leaving, reassigning, or dismissing someone from the field is never justified.

Churches must rigorously practice leader-driven sending.

4 Allowing personal relationships to override strategic decision-making



The worthy goal: Encouraging every church member’s involvement in missions

The dangerous shortcut: Allowing influential people in the church to dictate the missions program

Where the shortcut has taken us: Tragically, too many churches’ missions programs and budgets are invested in people/programs producing dubious impact because someone of influence championed their cause. As a result, the church feels unable to engage in high-impact priorities.

Getting back on the road: It is sobering to think that church leaders will someday stand before the Lord to give account for how we invested the time, talents, and finances of our people to achieve five-fold, 10-fold, 100-fold multiplication locally and globally. We cannot abdicate this responsibility. It requires clarifying biblical values, asking hard questions, and then prioritizing according.

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5 Limiting missions to “the ends of the earth”



The worthy goal: Increasing the number of workers focused on the least reached

The dangerous shortcut: Communicating to our people that the only valid response to the Great Commission is going to the 10/40 Window

Where the shortcut has taken us: Barriers rather than bridges are built when we imply that those engaged in other aspects of outreach and discipleship are second class.

Getting back on the road: We must clarify that reaching the ends of the earth requires intentional focus because it crosses more barriers and has been woefully underserved. However, missions is clearly both/and: “Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth.” While some in every church should champion the unreached, we must foster collaboration with those who are witnesses in their local area and region, as well as with efforts facilitating true disciple-making anywhere.

6 Separating “serving” from “saving”



The worthy goal: Meeting the holistic needs of a hurting world

The dangerous shortcut: Caving in to pressure to focus exclusively on issues of poverty and injustice, and to embrace the goal of transforming society without transforming the heart.

Where the shortcut has taken us: A false polarization between evangelism/church planting and holistic service

Getting back on the road: First, every church must teach a theology of the exclusiveness of the gospel robust enough to challenge the pluralism that has subtly invaded our Christian culture. At the same time, we must wholeheartedly embrace a concept of missions that marries gospel proclamation with

lifestyles that demonstrate God’s purpose to use His people to transform every sphere of life.

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7 Outsourcing global missions responsibility



The worthy goal: Engaging the congregation with powerful global ministries

The dangerous shortcut: Outsourcing missions by sponsoring an organization to roll in with a program, sign up donors for their agency, and in essence become the church’s surrogate global missions program

Where the shortcut has taken us: Many organizations sponsoring activities such as weekend truck campaigns excel in their specialized ministries. However, churches cannot divest themselves of their responsibility to engage in the broader, more complex work of missions. In addition, by encouraging their people to give directly to the agency, churches are, perhaps inadvertently, also giving away the ongoing responsibility to grapple with what God is calling them to do. Outsourcing also justifies what could be a counterproductive downsizing of a church’s global-missions staff.

Getting back on the road: Targeted giving (for instance to meet the needs of one child they can know personally) is far more satisfying for many believers than giving to the seemingly nebulous budget of their local church. Therefore, church leaders must do a better job of explaining what our missions efforts accomplish. We must also reject the temptation to “outsource” missions or eliminate strategic global engagements that require more time, money, and staff.

Check out our **Worth Considering...** blog and share your response to **“Finding the balance.”**

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