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+49 years missionary experience



Tony on a mission trip to India.

Many a zealous missionary has arrived on the field only to repeat the same mistakes made by those who preceded him. Well intentioned though they are, they still set about reinventing the wheel. Valuable time is wasted discovering what former missionaries have experienced, but few have recorded their experiences so as to be a blessing to those who follow. Zeal for the Lord is important, but it's not enough for the missionary, neither is having a firm grasp of the gospel; one needs to know what's involved in mission work. Future missionaries need to be in contact with reality and this is where Kevin Carson's book becomes an invaluable tool for anyone considering missions.

If you read this book by a former missionary expecting it to be an adventure novel filled with amazing events and heart-stopping encounters on the mission field, then you'll be disappointed. Kevin is an honest missionary as he speaks about his experiences in Cambodia and Lithuania, sharing both the highs and the lows he encountered in spreading the gospel. Furthermore, he destroys the myth about missions - that it's all excitement and that mountain top experiences are regular occurrences; these are the exceptions rather than the rule. Through his own experiences Kevin allows us see the reality of missions.

Everyone who goes into missions does so believing that many will be converted to the Lord Jesus Christ, and may God bless them for this noble thought. But the truth is that very few people on this planet are searching for God. No, the nationals in the country you go to serve will not be lined up at the airport begging you to share with them the gospel of Jesus. Sorry folks, that's just not going to happen. The reality is, nobody cares that you have arrived in their country. And yet you have come, compelled by a love for God and for people and a burning desire to tell the glorious message of a crucified and risen Christ.

Kevin is not shy about telling us that some come to the mission field with unholy motives. However, holy and pure motives must dominate the life of all those with a mission. Building monuments to ourselves and our work is not the reason we do missions. Missionaries are charged with building holy communities of godly people who love God and people and this is a point that has not been lost on our author.

Kevin has helpful things to say about choosing a place to do your mission work. We don't always need to start a new work. If there is a work that could use our help, if that exists, then join up with it. And then there are financial matters, which must always be conducted with utmost honesty and here Kevin leaves us in no doubt that being practical about fundraising is not unspiritual; the work of God requires some financial assistance. I recall at one point in my life being unsettled by the amount of time I was devoting to fundraising for gospel work in India. Then I recalled how the Apostle Paul devoted over a year of his time organizing fund raising among the churches to help the needy saints in Jerusalem. That little insight was solace to my troubled heart.

Chapters six and seven provide useful information about all that's involved in preparing to leave your family and country; a tremendous amount of preparation must come before you hear, 'This is the final boarding call...' And though what Kevin shares about preparing to leave and settling into your new home overseas is personal, much of what he says will be helpful to future missionaries.

And if you think that your mission destination is a field 'white unto harvest,' you are probably wrong. Yes, you want it to be ready for the harvest, but many fields are barren and it's the work of the missionary to do the hard work of sowing the seed of the gospel and waiting patiently to see if it will grow and then spending the rest of one's life nurturing God's children. This is where patience comes into play and it is something missionaries have to learn. None of us can make the seed grow; that's God's job. None of us can save anyone; only God can do that and we must, dare I say it, allow God to do what only God can do, save the lost. There will be well intentioned but seriously misguided missionaries who force conversions by pressuring people to be baptized. Those who engage in such a practice will find themselves with a congregation of baptized pagans and left wondering why there is no spiritual growth in the members.

We are not machines, we need rest. We need to take time out for ourselves. Someone said that when Jesus said to his disciples, 'Come apart and rest,' what he meant was, if you don't come apart and rest you'll come apart. And that brings us to the important question as to when the missionary should leave the field. No simple answers can be given but there are factors that have to be considered before that decision is made and Kevin provides, yet again, very practical help here. Each situation will be different and must be given individual consideration.

This book would have been invaluable to me had I read it before returning to Ireland in 1970. There are things I would have done differently, but like so many others I also reinvented the wheel. However, that does not have to be the case for future missionaries. They can now equip themselves to be more efficient and effective as missionaries of the Lord Jesus Christ. Being a missionary presents its own unique set of challenges, yet there is still no greater mission in life than proclaiming the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not only worth living for, it's worth dying for. That's why I find myself in agreement with Ignatius of Loyola who said to his students, 'Give up your small ambitions and come preach the gospel,' to which I say, 'Amen.'