

# What Missionaries Ought to Know about Those Who Stay When Others Leave

Imagine the following situation.

Carlos and Maria have completed their term of service and are going “home” for at least a year. Their children, Jose and Susi, are reluctantly going with them.

At the airport, Peter and Martha along with their two children, Billy and Betsy, have just told them goodbye and now their whole family is in the car headed back to their home. All four of them are lost in their own thoughts.

- Peter has mixed feelings. Carlos was an effective field director, but he expected everyone to be a workaholic like he was, so the pressure will be off. Unfortunately, Pete now has to serve as field director even though he dislikes administration, and it means he will not be able to spend much time on his ministry to street kids.
- Martha is happy. She majored in accounting but has not had a chance to do much of it because Maria was field treasurer. Now Martha will be able to use her skills.
- Billy is sad. Jose was his best friend, and now he will be almost the only boy there.
- Betsy is relieved. Susi teased her and made fun of her much of the time, and now Susie will not be around to do that.

People usually think about the effect of goodbyes on the people who are leaving. However, such goodbyes also have a variety of effects on those who remain. Some effects are positive, but others are negative. This brochure is about the negative effects on those who stay.

## What does the Bible say about those who stay?

Acts 20 and 21 describe several goodbyes, and three of them report the effects on those who stayed. Here is what happened to those who stayed when Paul said goodbye to the leaders of the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:36-38).

- They all wept.
- They embraced him.
- They kissed him goodbye.
- They grieved because he had told them they would never see his face again.
- They escorted him to the ship.

Later Paul spent a week with disciples in Syria, and here is what happened as he said goodbye to those who stayed (Acts 21:4-6).

- They urged Paul not to go on.
- The disciples, their wives, and their children escorted Paul out of the city.
- They all knelt on the beach to pray.
- They said their goodbyes and returned home.

Still later Paul spent a number of days with Phillip and his family in Caesarea. When Paul was about to leave, here is what the people staying there did (Acts 21:12-14).

- They pleaded with Paul not to go on.
- They wept and broke Paul’s heart.
- They finally gave up and said, “The Lord’s will be done.”

Note that parting was very difficult for those who stayed. They asked Paul not to leave, and often wept as he left. Parting was certainly not easy for those who remained in the Bible, and it is often not easy today.

## Who stays?

Of course, many people stay when missionaries leave, but here are some of the most common ones that have to stay.

- Family members at “home.” Retired missionaries may have difficulty when their TCK children and grandchildren leave to serve in another culture.
- Colleagues at “home.” Missionaries serving at headquarters may find it hard watching friends leave for service in other countries.
- Colleagues in host country. Missionaries who have to stay when others transfer to another part of the country, another field, or leave for their home ministry assignment.

Children may react differently to being “left behind” than adults do. Adults usually understand why others leave, but young TCKs may react negatively when their best friends are suddenly taken from them. If adults explain it by saying that God has called the other family to another place, the children may blame God for it.

Parents need to remember that nearly half a century ago Elizabeth Kubler-Ross found that those, including children, who experience grief may deny the loss, become angry about it, try bargaining to prevent it, or become depressed before they accept it. These are all normal reactions to loss.

## What happens to those who stay?

Whenever a missionary on the field leaves, a new system or structure will emerge. If the departing missionary was the leader who represented the agency in the country, someone else will have to take that place. If

that person was responsible for finances, someone will have to become treasurer.

Even if the departing missionaries did not hold “official” positions, they held positions in the social structure of the field. This means that remaining people will find themselves in new roles even if they would rather not assume those roles.

- Some may find themselves “promoted” to administrative positions even if they do not want to be leaders.
- Others may find themselves assigned positions they are not “qualified” for, such as being treasurer when they have no financial training.
- If the person who left was a bubbly extrovert who loved to plan parties, which of the remaining people (all introverts) will play that role?
- If the agency wants to continue the ministry the departing missionary originated, and everyone else has their own ministry, who will take on that new ministry?

The list can go on and on.

## What are the effects on those who stay?

Those who stay may be delighted to see a workaholic field director gone or they may have feelings of loss and grief when an encouraging one leaves. The range of negative emotions may range from minor disappointment to major depression.

- Disappointment because friends are leaving.
- Loneliness from missing friendly faces.
- Betrayal because friends left though they had said they would stay.
- Anger that they are abandoned by friends.

- Anxiety because those left do not know what to do.
- Grief because of the great loss of their leaving.
- Depression from unresolved grief.  
All of these can lead to a very difficult time on the field.

### What can be done by those who stay?

Those left behind need to realize that they are going through a transition very much like those who go. They are entering a different situation but not moving to a different place. A good beginning is to build a RAFT like those who leave often do.

- Reconciliation. Resolve any hard feelings between them and those who are leaving
- Affirmation. Tell those who are leaving how much they are appreciated.
- Farewells. Say goodbyes to those who are leaving.
- Think Future. Begin to make plans for what must be done right where they are.

As those who stay build their RAFT, they need to remember that they want to accomplish two things: First, they want to create a way that they can keep in touch with those who are leaving. Second, they want to build a new life with others who remain. In this digital age developing a way to keep in touch is relatively simple.

- Exchange email addresses with everyone as you bid them farewell. Everyone probably already has these, but make sure.
- “Friend” those who are most important on Facebook or some other social network. That way those who stay and those who leave can post information about themselves and keep up with each other.

- Exchange Skype names with closest friends too so that they can converse “face-to-face” in the future.

As they develop these ways of communicating, both those who stay and those who go must remember that many of these relationships will become more distant as they all build new lives with those present in the near future.

Second, as they think about their new life with others who remain and new people who come, they begin to develop other relationships. Consider the following items.

- Others who also stayed have many of the same losses and are looking for new friends. Social situations change, so people they already know may become friends and confidants.
- New people may come to the field, and they will be looking for new friends. Those who stay may be able to help them adjust—and make friends while doing that.
- Those who stay may consider the broader missionary “family” in their area including people serving with other agencies.
- They may try new things and doing things in new ways. While doing so they may make new friends.

Above all they need to feel free to grieve their losses during this time of transition. This just “comes with the territory” of missionary life, so everyone needs to expect it and make the best of it. As time goes on new relationships will develop. These relationships will not be the same as the old ones, but some may be even better.

Ronald Koteskey  
Member Care Consultant  
GO InterNational

This brochure is one of a series, and you are invited to suggest other topics you would like to know about to the following:

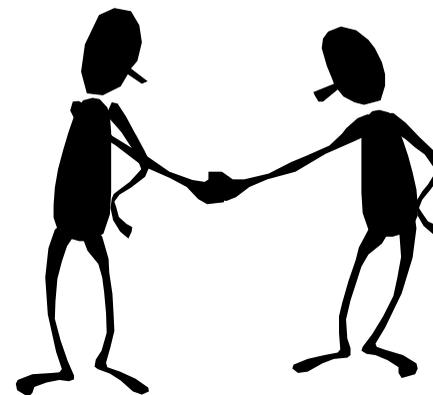
Ronald Koteskey  
122 Lowry Lane  
Wilmore, KY 40390

Phone: (859) 858-3436

e-mail: ron@missionarycare.com

Visit the following web site to access other brochures in the series:

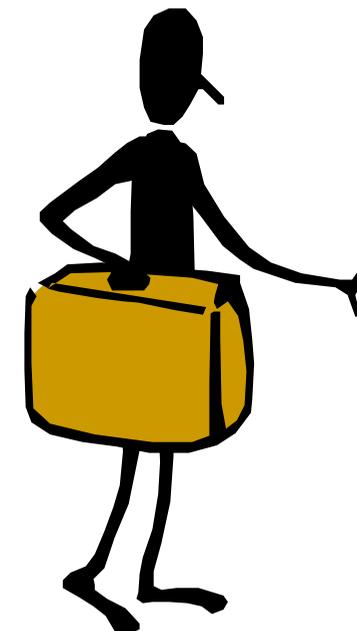
[www.missionarycare.com](http://www.missionarycare.com)



This brochure may be reproduced without change and in its entirety for non-commercial purposes without permission.

# What Missionaries Ought to Know about Those Who Stay When Others Leave

Ronald L. Koteskey



GO InterNational