

What Missionaries Ought to Know about Rejection and Betrayal (by Those They Serve)

After more than 30 years of successful teaching in the Bible school, Bill was finishing the final course before the class graduated. He handed out the Bible school's evaluation form to the six students in the class and left the room while they filled out the forms.

When the director handed out the evaluation results to the Bible faculty, Bill found that five of the six students had given him the lowest possible ratings on everything, said that he did not know how to teach, that he should not be allowed to teach until he took a course about teaching, and so forth.

Bill was devastated because he had advised these students for three years, and they had often been in his home. He developed a fear of what else students might say, prayed for God to protect him from his students, and finally quit teaching a few years later to devote himself to member care.

Bill knew that Isaiah had said that Jesus would be “despised and rejected” by people (Isaiah 53). He knew John had said that “his own did not receive him,” that Judas “betrayed him,” and that the people he came to save shouted “crucify him” (John 1, 18 and 19). All of that was necessary for Jesus to die for people's sins, but Bill did not think it would happen to him as he came to spread the good news of salvation and to give food to the hungry. Does this happen to others? Who does it? Why do they do it? What can the ‘victim’ do?

How often does this happen?

Only God knows. Such rejection and betrayal often leads to feelings of inadequacy and failure which few people discuss openly. Although there appears to be no research on this topic for missionaries, in the 1990s research on pastors who read *Christianity Today*, *Leadership*, and *Your Church* magazines found that about a quarter of the pastors had been terminated or forced to resign by their church—and a quarter of those had experienced it more than once. In addition, a third of all the pastors said the pastor serving before them had been forced out—and a third of those forced out left the ministry for good. Clearly, the rejection of Christian workers is not rare.

Were cross-cultural workers in the Bible rejected and betrayed?

Of course they were! The Bible contains many examples, but here are just a few from the life of Moses in the Old Testament and Paul in the New Testament.

Moses had been sent by God to bring the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 3). Here are a few of the problems he faced.

- His brother and his sister “began to talk against Moses” because of his wife (Numbers 12).
- The people “raised their voices,” “wept aloud,” “grumbled against Moses,” “grew in impatience,” “gathered in opposition,” and wanted to go back to Egypt (Numbers 14, 20, and 21).
- Korah “became insolent” and led 250 community leaders to oppose Moses. This resulted in the earth opening and swallowing the 250 men and their

families. The next day others in the community still grumbled, and a plague killed 14,700 of them (Numbers 16).

Talking about Paul, God said, “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles...and the people of Israel (Acts 9). As Paul began to do this, he had good results on Cyprus, and things began well in Pisidian Antioch where he was invited to speak again the next week (Acts 13:1-42). However, people soon began to turn on Paul.

- In Antioch, some of the Jews became jealous and “talked abusively” against Paul. People of the city “stirred up persecution”...and “expelled them from their region” (Acts 13:43-52)
- In Iconium, at first many Jews and Gentiles believed. However, later “there was a plot afoot” to “mistreat them and stone them,” so they left town (Acts 14:1-7).
- In Lystra, things were going so well that the people there thought Paul was a god! However, the crowd eventually stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city because they thought he was dead (Acts 14:8-20).

What happens?

As noted above, a wide variety of things can occur, ranging from “talking against” people to killing them. In addition, today's technology makes many new things possible.

- Damaging emails can be sent at once to hundreds of people, including colleagues or supporters.
- Anonymous nasty letters mailed directly to missionaries may hurt incredibly.

- Innuendo of scandal posted on Facebook or other social networks can wreck missionary reputations.
- Critics can use smart phones to “tweet” damaging text messages to thousands.

There seems to be virtually no limit to how rejection and betrayal can occur.

Who does it?

Only people who have personal relationships can betray missionaries, just as Judas, a trusted disciple, betrayed Jesus. In *Why*, a song about this event, Michael Card says, “Only a friend can betray a friend, a stranger has nothing to gain, and only a friend comes close enough to ever cause so much pain.” Usually the deeper the relationship, the greater is the devastation of the betrayal. Here are some examples.

- Students. Many teachers find students they have known and trusted for years have ridiculed and betrayed them.
- Congregations. Many pastors have been shocked when small groups persuade entire congregations to ask them to leave.
- Pastors. Missionaries supervising national pastors may find those pastors rejecting or betraying them.
- Patients. Medical missionaries may find that people whose lives they save betray them.
- The Poor. Relief workers may find themselves rejected or betrayed by those who most needed the food they provided.
- Missionaries. Field directors who came to lead the field may find that missionaries they came to serve reject them—and even betray them.

Why do they do it?

Sin is at the root, but it may be expressed in a variety of forms as we can see in the following examples from the Bible and modern missionaries.

- Jealousy. The Jews in Antioch were jealous of the crowds Paul drew (Acts 13:45). These Jews then followed Paul from city to city (Acts 14).
- Dislike. Aaron and Miriam did not like Moses wife (Number 12).
- Fear and want. The people who criticized Moses were frightened by the lack of water (Numbers 20-21).
- Revenge. Students may reject or betray teachers who discipline them or demand high standards.
- Greed. Patients may sue physicians to get whatever money they can.

What can one do?

“An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure” is a common saying that is relevant here. Keeping good relationships with people is always important, but it is especially so in a culture that emphasizes such relationships. Missionaries must not become so task-oriented that they neglect meeting social needs. Missionaries rejected or betrayed by those they serve can do the following.

- Pray for the offenders. Both Jesus and Moses prayed for those who mistreated them, both asking God to forgive the offenders. Moses went so far as to ask God to “blot me out of the book” if he did not forgive the people (Exodus 32:32). Jesus asked God to forgive those who crucified him because they did not realize what they were doing (Luke 23:34).

- Forgive them. Of course, both Jesus and Paul forgave those who had rejected or betrayed them as well.
- Revisit them. Because people in Antioch, Iconium, and Lsytra had persecuted him, plotted against him and stoned him, one might have thought that Paul would avoid returning. However, Paul made it a point to return home through all three places, encouraging and strengthening believers there (Acts 14:21-22).
- Find a mediator. If effective in the culture where missionaries serve, they may use the three step procedure that Jesus proposed. First, go to the offending person alone. If that does not work, they may take one or two others and go back to the offending person. Finally, if even that does not work, they may bring it before the church (Matthew 18:15-17).
- Resolve disagreements as soon as possible. Festering wounds, even if imaginary, can develop into deadly relationships when left alone.
- Do not say or do anything that one might regret later. In the heat of an intense discussion filled with anger, it is much better to remain silent than to vent all the hurt and frustration one feels at the moment. Take time to think and pray about what to say or do.
- Have other missionaries who can help you as you respond. Personal attacks on missionaries and their ministry usually cloud judgments. Missionaries need close friends to evaluate the attacks and help devise a response.

Finally, remember that God used Judas’ money-making betrayal combined with Jesus’ obedient submission to save a sinful world.

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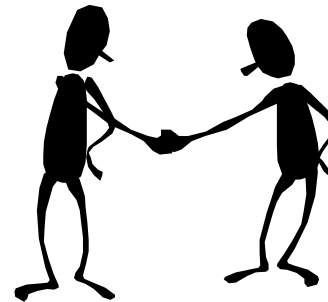
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