



CONCILIUM

CHOOSING TO STAY

Processing how our desire
to risk can endanger others

By Scott Brawner



SUMMARY

Part of my ministry is helping gospel workers and their organizations process stay-go decision making. These are tough decisions to make and discerning God's will in these situations is often challenging.

There can be genuine reasons to stay in places facing significant shifts in the old normal of a previous season of peace. However, we must also understand the liabilities and consequences if we do choose to stay as a shift takes place to a dangerous season into a new normal.

Whether the normal is shifting because of social upheaval, civil war, invasion, occupation, or other reasons, we must weigh our decisions not only by how they impact us, but also how our decisions to stay impact our national brothers and sisters in the short and long term of a shifting normal.



INTRODUCTION

As I have said in the past, I am a fan of the “strategic vacation” for gospel workers facing new threats generated by violent conflict and acts of war (VCAW). When Gospel workers have no experience serving in conflict zones or ministering in areas occupied by foreign control, there is a real need to prepare and adjust to this new environment in order to ensure ministry effectiveness.

Thus, a strategic vacation is not an evacuation; it is an opportunity to depart a potential conflict zone for the express purpose of decompressing and strengthening emotionally and spiritually from a place of safety as one counts the cost of obedience and determines next steps for effective ministry in a potentially high-risk area.





THREE QUESTIONS

Clearly there are many considerations to process when choosing to stay or to go. Listed below are the top three questions I try to help gospel workers process as they consider their desire to stay.



PREPARATION PRIORITIES

- Food
- Water
- Shelter
- First Aid and Medicines
- Cooking Fuel
- Redundant Communication
- Transportation



THREAT CONCERNS

- Will my presence cause others unnecessary scrutiny for authorities?
- Can my presence get someone arrested?
- Can my presence cause someone tortured or killed?

ARE YOU PREPARED?

Given the significance of the threat, are you prepared to support yourself, your family, or your team for a long season in a foreign occupied location or territory? In situations where new incidents of VCAW are taking place, the likelihood that basic necessities will dry up and become extremely limited is high. Lacking basic necessities, then, will your presence become a burden to your local brothers and sisters? Worse, will those same brothers and sisters feel a burden to care for you while taking away from caring for themselves? Having a desire to support local believers with your presence is certainly noble. However, becoming a liability to your local partners (in Jesus' name no less...) because you are ill prepared for the circumstances is NOT what anyone wants to do. Therefore, make sure that, if you are going to stay, you are prepared to be a blessing and not a liability.

IS YOUR PRESENCE A THREAT?

Is your presence as a foreign national going cause more harm than good for your national brothers and sisters? While your desire to stay may be to forge solidarity with your co-laborers in Christ, you must be very careful you don't put them at risk due to your nationality. In an area that is newly occupied by a foreign power, ideological fervor runs high. Therefore, you must be careful that your nationality does not create an ideological threat for your local partners. As a Westerner in a newly occupied area, you will (at best) be seen as an interloper by the occupiers. Worse the authorities may consider you a spy. Either way, your relationships with your local partners could well place them at risk. Remember, it is one thing to suffer alongside your local brothers and sisters as a Christian for the sake of the Gospel; it is an entirely separate issue to bring danger to them because they are seen as supporting interlopers or spies. Though your heart may be to stay with your partners, they may well be safer with your absence. This is a serious concern and should not be ignored.

PRAYER AND AGREEMENT?



PRAYER AND AGREEMENT

- Family
- Team
- Organization
- Local Partners

If you stay, is there prayer and agreement between family, team members, and your organizational leadership? Is there prayer and agreement between you and your local partners to accept the risk of your staying? Has God granted peace to all parties involved in your present course of action (to stay or to go)? What has the Lord told each of you after a time of concerted prayer in the word? In these situations, it is critical there be agreement and peace with decision making. To help individuals and teams process decision making, Concilium teaches the principle:

“Where the Bible is silent, you must follow your conscience as you submit it to God’s will through God’s word.”

We would never ask you to violate your conscience. However, if your organization asks you to depart and you chose to stay, understand you have exceeded your organization’s duty of care mandate and are now outside their legal and moral duty to help you in a time of need. Quite often, the decision to stay forces a person to resign from their organization in order to stay. there is much to consider here.



WHAT'S NEXT

“It is always better to establish margin for decision making before a crisis.”

The intent of these recommendations is to help gospel workers build margin into their decision making. It is always better to establish margin for decision making before a crisis instead of during a crisis. Without margin, we often see decision making happening in a panic, compounded by a fear, and often exacerbated by communication interruption. This kind of poor decision making can lead to disaster for those on the ground.

I hope this document is helpful in your decision making to stay or go. These are hard decisions to make, no doubt. However, it is always better to make those decisions in agreement with all effected parties before a crisis begins because making stay-go decisions in the midst of a critical incident is never a good place to be.

For more information on stay-go decisions, including free resources for developing thresholds for departure and benchmarks for return, visit www.concilium.us/RESOURCES

But If Not!

Scott Brawner
President, Concilium



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Brawner is a writer, speaker, President of Concilium, and the Executive Director of the Risk Management Network. He is an expert in the field of safety, security, and crisis management for gospel workers serving in open and closed countries with Christian missionary agencies, humanitarian organizations, and creative access entities. Scott is one of the most widely traveled and experienced leaders in his field with work and ministry in more than 110 countries around the world.

Scott lives in the United States with his wife and three children.

