Distraction: The Great Disqualifier

By Greg Fritz

There was so much reason for hope. The multitude of faces reflected excitement and expectation of what God was about to do. It was obvious that God had answered our many prayers requesting that everyone at "Urbana Onward" would come with open hearts. Yet, I felt momentarily disheartened. Why wasn't I joining the rest of the delegates in praise?

Later, pondering that initial negative response, I realized that the zeal of the group had thrown me into a flashback to my days as a student. While in school I attended several similar conferences with great enthusiasm and equal peer support. My depression at Urbana Onward was in response to the realization that most of the conferees would never fulfill the commitments that they would make during the weekend.

Why is it that so many good intentions are never realized? Insincerity, parental or peer pressure, and disobedience are possibilities, but I am inclined to think that the most successful ploy of the Evil One is distraction. I shudder to think of the number of prime mission candidates who never make it out of the US because a series of distractions eventually disqualify them.

Jake and Liz

Take Jake Morrison for example. Jake recognized his responsibility to release control of every area of his life to Christ, including missions. He decided to attend a missions conference. Jake listened intently to the speakers and became increasingly excited. He spent time gathering information from the mission booths, inquiring about openings for people with the degree he hoped to receive.

At the climax of the conference a speaker called for commitment. At the appropriate time Jake and others stood and prayed, "Lord, I am willing to be a missionary, and I plan to 'go' unless you direct me otherwise." Jake left the conference with renewed fervor.

During the next two years Jake remained actively involved in his campus Christian group while he worked toward graduation. During this time he regularly attended Sunday church services. Now and then he thought about his future in missions, never thinking his school loans could hold him back. As graduation drew near Jake started exploring the options for missions involvement. After a thorough investigation of the opportunities, he found that there were several things amiss, preventing his immediate departure. He needed to stay home and pay off his school loans. He also needed further training, both in Bible and his particular field.

The mission agencies he talked to also made Jake aware of his need for a support group. This group, usually a church, would need to stand behind him prayerfully and financially if he were to go out. He had thought that this wasn't so important for him as he intended to go as a "tentmaker," but he learned that "tentmakers" are just as dependent, and often more so, on a sending base as other missionaries. Therefore, Jake needed to spend the next three to five years developing deep relationships with his home church. If he had been planning, he could have been doing this during his college years.

All this information caught Jake slightly off guard, but he was flexible. After graduation he set out to rectify all these problems. He got a job and started taking a few classes (when he

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could fit them in) and got very involved in his church. Jake figured he'd be ready to go in two to four years. Jake figured he'd be ready to go in two to four years.

Unfortunately, that turned out to be a very optimistic projection. Jake had underestimated the cost of moving out from under his parents' protection. That meant he could not pay off his loans as fast as he'd expected. Nor did he foresee himself falling in love with Liz, a girl he met at his church. Liz was a very nice girl and a committed Christian, but she was not as enthusiastic about missions as Jake.

Nevertheless, she was open to the Lord's leading. As Jake and Liz looked at their future they realized it would be at least five years before they would be able to become missionaries with both loans to pay off, language and Bible classes to take, and time for both to build solid relationships in their church. So they decided to buy a house because "buying is cheaper than renting."

By now you can probably foresee the rest of the story. Jake and Liz were 35 years old when they realized they would never make it to the mission field. They had been delayed by a series of distractions until they were disqualified. They did not set practical plans and goals to work through the steps of getting to the field, and thus, never got around to their classes, applying to agencies, and going to language school. Jake and Liz are not a rare case. They are more the rule than the exception.

What about You?

Have you made a lifetime commitment to missions? Is God asking you to fulfill your commitment in a cross-cultural setting? Is he asking you to make your commitment real by being a sender? Will you be distracted? Don't be distracted! Plan! Anticipate distraction! How? At the end of this article is a simple tool that may help to keep you headed in the right direction. After prayer, write down the answers to the series of questions below. Seek counsel on your answers. Choose someone (e.g., your pastor) who can give wise counsel and help hold you accountable. Put your plan in an obvious place so you can use it to keep you from distraction. Update your plan regularly (at least every six months). Whatever God's plan is for you, don't be disqualified because you were distracted.

My Plan

- At the end of my life I hope that (life objective):
- In light of my life objective, in the next six months I will (short-term goal. It is possible to work on several steps at the same time, but it is easier to concentrate on one at a time. Choose and focus on one goal during these six months):
- I will employ the following one or two programs or activities to accomplish my short-term goal:

Greg Fritz was the founder of Caleb Project and its president/CEO for more than 25 years.

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