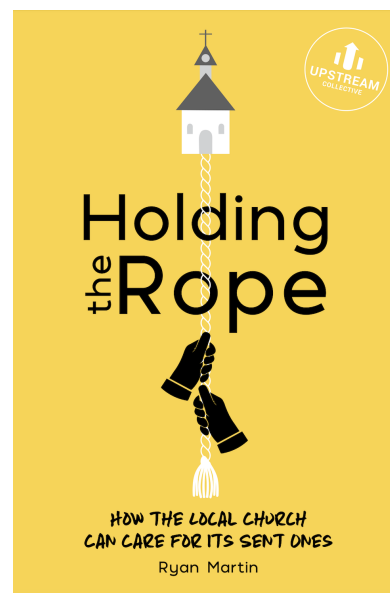


**Martin, Ryan. *Holding the Rope: How the Local Church Can Care for Its Sent Ones*. Knoxville, Tennessee: Upstream Collective, 2022.**

Reviewed by Geoff Bowen, IMB Personnel, North Africa and the Middle East

With the release of *Holding the Rope: How the Local Church Can Care for Its Sent Ones*, Ryan Martin has provided a valuable resource for churches who want to care well for those they send to serve cross-culturally. Ryan's experience as missions pastor in the local church and current role as Director of Missions and Operations for LightBearers (lightbearers.com) gives him a broad perspective on the unique relationship between missionaries, their local church and the agencies that send them. Martin's primary target audience is sending churches with a desire to assist churches to see that sending members to the ends of the earth is not the finish line; rather, it is the beginning of a partnership to support and sustain care for missionaries through pre-field, on-field, and post-field care.

The book begins with a broad view of the biblical and theological foundation of missionary care. Drawing from three key passages (3 John 5-8, Philippians 2:25-30, and Acts 14:26-28), Martin addresses the need to identify, assess, equip and send members on mission, care and support them on the field, and give them opportunity to report, rest, and recharge when returning from the field. He then explores the relationship between the church and the sending agency, with an emphasis on how their roles and responsibilities for missionary care are complementary rather than exclusive. He highlights



the need for consistent and on-going communication to clarify expectations between the two. The appendix of the book includes valuable examples and templates of models of care strategies. These include pre-, on- and post-field components drawn from several churches of various sizes and contexts. Martin also includes an extensive bibliography for readers who want to go deeper in their exploration of caring for sent ones.

Throughout the book, I found Martin's emphasis on the local church's primary responsibility to support gospel workers a helpful one, recognizing that there is a gap for many on-field workers are in this relationship. Martin's book can help churches develop a comprehensive and helpful strategy of care to close this gap. He mentions the unique needs of TCKs, singles, wives and couples in strategy development. He also acknowledges that there are cases in which care can negatively impact retention. Ryan champions the need for Advocacy Teams and on-field visits as vital components to maintaining on-going care relationships.

I read  *Holding the Rope*  through multiple lenses: over 30 years of local church ministry including sending and going on short-term trips, three terms as a sent one to Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Latin America, and as a parent with children who have served in Southeast Asia, Canada, South America, and Northeast Africa. I found myself challenged by insights that "I wish I had known when I was sending" to have developed a more robust care strategy for ones we sent out. Encouraging the development of Advocacy Teams could be a key element to continuing care even through normal transitions local churches experience, such as staff transition.

As we begin our next term, there are conversations that we will have with our sending church that will be enriched by Martin's observations. And, as a father, I expect to use the principles presented to have deeper and more meaningful conversations with my children as they serve. This book could be helpful to field and team leaders who are interviewing and assimilating new team members into their organizations to help them advocate for themselves

and their needs as they have conversations with their sending churches about how to best support them on the field.

Churches who send, care, and receive well develop healthy relationships and partnerships with their missionaries and the agencies that support them.  *Holding the Rope*  is a helpful resource for sending churches to develop and strengthen comprehensive care to those they have sent. For missionaries who see the need to facilitate conversations with their sending churches, I also commend  *Returning Well: Your Guide to Thriving Back “Home” after Serving Cross-Culturally*  by Melissa Chaplin. This resource will help missionaries identify personal areas of need to help them communicate with their sending church how that congregation might go deeper in their supporting and caring relationships.