

Going Home

When you return you don't usually expect to have to "reenter" your own culture but remember this: **You have experienced significantly different people and places and you have changed!**

This experience will continue to change your attitude, outlook, and life values. You will have new perspectives and a new appreciation for what God is doing in the world and how you "fit in it". It may take months or even years for you to understand the total impact, but remember this is only a step in a lifelong journey. The magnitude and effect of your cross-cultural experience may elude for a time, and you may even deny that you are different. Then, after a period of time, you will begin to realize and appreciate the changes in your perspective of the Lord, and of the people of the World that He loves.

As you know God wants to conform us to the image of Christ so as you return to your home, work, neighborhood, church, or your school, you will have unique opportunities to share your overseas experience. Share with enthusiasm, love, and compassion. However, if you encounter apathy or insensitivity and you will, **don't allow yourself to be critical!** Show how God is changing you from who you were, to the person He wants you to be. Share how you are beginning the lifelong journey of seeing the people of the world from God's perspective rather than from your own. Choose to serve rather than being served. Talk is cheap, but your actions will prove your new love and vision.

As I said this trip was only the first step in this lifelong journey. Remember how frightening it was to take that step of faith to come to Swaziland? Now consider the impact on your life, you wouldn't have missed it. The second step of your journey begins as you

choose to obey, grow, and get to know God as a friend, a loving Father, and most importantly as Lord over all. To grow significantly, you will need to exercise discipline. It will take some effort on your part. The choice is up to you. Don't allow yourself to fall into old patterns and routines. As you grow and mature, you will be able to understand God's will for you much more clearly. The Word of God is the key to unlocking God's plan for your life. There is no substitute. Don't misplace your key – choose to read and meditate on scripture as you continue to spend quality time in His Word.

Reentry Stress

It is often signaled by the feelings of:

- **Loneliness** – You feel isolated from family or friends, all alone in a crowd.
- **Being “out of place”** – You don't seem to “fit” anymore.
- **Detachment** – You are watching what is going on, but you're more a spectator than participant.
- **Confusion** – Even common situations can create unusual feelings or responses in you.
- **Frustration** – No one understands or even cares how much you want to make a difference now that you are home.
- **Anger** – Materialism and indifference to things that matter make you angry.
- **Discontentment** – The place you just left seems more like home than the surroundings you have returned to. You want to “escape.”

Just remember that several weeks or months ago you were happy, comfortable and totally involved in some of the same things that now often seem to frustrate you or “rub you the wrong way.” These unsettling feelings may be subtle and may grow more or less intense as time goes on.

Keep trying to identify your feelings, and resist the temptation to feel “special” now that you are back. Look for your significance in the fact that you are a child of God and not that you served on an overseas short-term missions trip. You must do that by faith. Our flesh wants to be applauded and uplifted, but God is pleased by our humility.

Serve your way to success and you will begin to understand that God’s ways are not our ways. He has wonderful plans for us that are sometimes beyond our wildest dreams.

The Final Challenge

Amid your incredibly busy schedules, commitments and obligations I want to challenge you with doing the following:

1. Find a quiet place and spend a minimum of 1 to 2 hours of undisturbed time reflecting on your overseas experiences. Leave your familiar surroundings if you need to.
2. In your journal write as much as you can about the Lord, lessons you've learned, and ways you have changed.
3. Document your desire and an action plan to preserve your new and different outlook and perspectives on life.
4. Sign and date your journal page when you have this completed.
5. Share your current thoughts and feelings with someone you trust (preferably someone with overseas experience who understands the reentry transition that you are going through).
6. Schedule a team get-together that includes spouses and families within a month of returning. This get-together should include food, fellowship and sharing and is also a great time to share pictures and videos.
7. I challenge you to give, go, and pray more for missions and missionaries.
8. On your next STM trip I challenge you to take someone with you that has never been on a short-term missions trip.