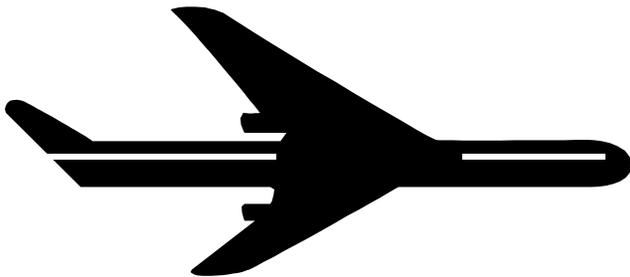


Coming “Home”: The Reentry Transition

Ron & Bonnie Koteskey
Member Care Consultants

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Ronald L. Koteskey

122 Lowry Lane,
Wilmore, KY 40390
USA

(859) 858-3436

ron@missionarycare.com
bonnie@missionarycare.com

www.missionarycare.com

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New Hope International Ministries

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Preface

When you return to your passport country, it is important to get debriefed. This can be done in several ways, such as in a group, with one other person, or even by yourself. Such debriefing is valuable in bringing closure to your time overseas and integrating the experiences you had there into your life as you prepare for what is next.

This book can be used as preparation for, or during, debriefing in a group context. A group, with a facilitator as a guide, is valuable for you to see that you are not alone in your reactions to returning to your passport country after living in a host country for some time. Having an “Acculturation Problem” upon reentry is recognized as a normal reaction as noted in Appendix A.

This book can also be used as an aid when being debriefed by another person who understands what is involved in making the transition from missions to life at “home.” An understanding pastor, counselor, or other missionary may be invaluable in helping you make the change.

Finally, if there is no group or other person available, you can use this book to debrief yourself. Although it is best to be able to talk your experience over with others who understand, you will still find it valuable to think about them yourself. Set aside a couple days by yourself and spend an hour or two considering the material in each of these chapters.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Phaeacian sailors deposited the sleeping Odysseus on the shore of Ithaca, his homeland, to reach which he had struggled for twenty years of unspeakable suffering. He stirred and woke from sleep in the land of his fathers, but he knew not his whereabouts. Ithaca showed him an unaccustomed face; he did not recognize the pathways stretching into the distance, the quiet bays, the crags and precipices. He rose to his feet and stood staring at what was his own land, crying mournfully: “Alas! And now where on earth am I? What do I here myself?” (Homer, *The Odyssey*)

Even today after living in another culture for a while people reentering their homeland with its different culture may experience what Homer described Odysseus feeling nearly 3000 years ago. Furthermore, one does not have to be gone twenty years to feel this way. The change of geographical places is accompanied by a psychological transition that may take much longer than it took to move physically from one place to another. These transitions are experienced by anyone crossing cultures, including those in the military, the diplomatic corps, the business world, and the missionary force.

When making any change in life, it is good to take time to “process” the changes and see how they fit into your life. Nearly 4000 years ago Hagar was in transition when an angel of the Lord found her and carried on the following conversation (Genesis 16:8-9).

- Angel: “Where have you come from?”
- Angel: “Where are you going?”
- Hagar: “I’m running away from...” (she had been mistreated)
- Angel: “Go back to...”

This gives us a good outline of how to look at the changes in our lives: thinking about where we have been, where we are going, and where we are right now. Of course, we can not actually go back in time, but we can go back in our memories and think about what has happened and see where those experiences fit in our lives.

The first such recorded change experienced by Christian workers was not even a cross-cultural one, but Jesus took those workers aside to process what had happened. In Luke 9:1-10 (also found in Matthew 10-14 and in Mark 6), we have a summary of the first “reentry” after an evangelistic campaign. Note that Jesus

- called them together (v. 1);
- gave them power and authority (v. 1);
- commissioned them to preach and heal (v. 2);
- oriented them about what to take and what to expect (v. 3-5).

Then they went on their crusade (v. 6). When they returned, they reported to Jesus, telling him what they had done (v. 10). Of course, they did not report to Jesus because he needed to know—like your sending agency would want to know what you did while you were gone. They reported to him because it was good for them to review for themselves what had happened, and it was good for all of them to hear from each other what had happened while they were gone. Then Jesus took them with him to a remote place near Bethsaida, the beginning of the first “reentry retreat” or “transition workshop” (v. 10). It is good to take time to talk about what has happened to you, especially to talk about this with others who have had similar experiences.

The first cross-cultural reentry by Christian missionaries is recorded at the end of Acts 14. There we read about Paul and Barnabas returning to their “home church” in Antioch where they had been commissioned. They had completed their work during their first term, and they gathered their local church together to report what had happened. They reported two things (v. 27).

- First, they reported all that God had done with them. Note that they did the same thing when they arrived at headquarters in Jerusalem and met with the apostles and elders there for the first time (15:4). It is good to report to your supporters and those to whom you are responsible what God has done with you.
- Second, they reported how God had converted those of other cultures. Again note that they did this same thing when they visited from congregation to congregation as they traveled (15:3). It is good to report what God has done for others.

As you reenter your homeland with your “passport culture,” you may go through three stages.

- First is a period of “leaving” your host culture, a time of “ending” your connections there. This begins when you begin making preparations to travel home. Unfortunately sometimes people are unable to really “leave” things behind.
- Second is an “in between” period in which you do not feel at “home” in either the host culture you are leaving or in your passport culture into which you are entering. During this period, you are really a “homeless” person, even though you have a house in which to live. This begins when you actually board the plane to return.
- Third is a period of “entering” your passport culture, a time of “beginning” again to establish a life there. This period may continue for months, or even longer as you again come to feel more and more “at home.”

Chapter 2

Closing the Last Chapter: Part I— Leaving Good things

We seem to live our lives in “sections” with transitions between these sections. We go to preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, college, and then to work. In our work we may flip burgers a while, teach a while, preach a while, then serve as missionaries a while, etc. We may think of these sections as being like chapters in a book. Some people actually write their autobiographies as chapters in journals or diaries. Other people just have them “written” on the pages of their mind and grouped together in one section of their memory.

When you come to the end of a chapter of your life and are ready to transition into the next one, it is often helpful to review what has happened in the chapter you just completed. This is a good time to see how the most recent chapter fits in with the overall story of your life and bring that chapter to a close. You started the chapter review when you filled out your debrief form as you responded to items about your ministry, your colleagues on the field, your family, nationals, your field director, etc. Now that you have actually returned to your passport country, it is time to bring that chapter to a close and begin to anticipate the next chapter in your life.

People may find it difficult to close one chapter to go on to the next. If they cannot emotionally leave the things of one chapter behind, such people may have trouble getting into the next chapter. They may carry things over from one chapter to the next and never get closure. Taking time to reflect on what has happened and talking things over with others who have similar experiences often helps lift the emotional fog so that one does not continue with baggage from the previous chapter. Reflection also helps with grieving the loss of your host country and culture.

Since you are back in your passport country, change has come in your life. Now you are in transition, the reorientation process already taking place within you as you adapt to the change that has taken place. Your transition probably began several weeks or months ago as you made plans to return. A good way to continue that transition process is to consider some of the good things that have happened to you. Paul and Barnabas must have done this when they returned from their first term of service because their friend, Luke, recorded some good things in Acts 13-14.

- Paul preached a marvelous message of encouragement in Antioch (in Pisida) (13:16-41).
- The sermon was so good that as he was leaving, he was invited back to preach the next week (13:42).
- At Iconium he spoke so effectively that many Jews and Gentiles alike believed (14:1).
- That message was confirmed by miracles (14:1-3).
- In Lystra the healing was so dramatic that people thought Paul and Barnabas were gods (14:8-12).

Even as an experienced missionary at the end of his third term of service Paul reviewed many of the good things he had done. While talking with the elders of the Ephesian church, he mentioned the following things (Acts 20).

- Served the Lord with great humility (v. 19)
- Preached anything that would be helpful (v. 20)
- Taught publicly (v. 20)
- Taught in homes (v. 20)
- Did not discriminate racially (v. 21)
- Obeyed the Holy Spirit (v. 22)
- Preached the kingdom (v. 25)
- Proclaimed the whole will of God (v. 27)
- Never stopped warning the people (v. 31)
- Committed people to God’s grace (v. 32)
- Took no money for his service (v. 33)
- Supplied his own needs (v. 34)
- Supplied the needs of those with him (v. 34)
- Modeled that we must work hard to help the needy (v. 35)
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Go back to the top of Paul’s list to the Ephesian elders and check off the ones that you have done yourself in your most recent term of service. No one will have done them all, but you will have probably done some of them. Then go on to the blank spaces at the end of the list and add other good things that you have done.

Take time to look at your debrief form and first consider some of the other good things that have happened this term.

- What were some of the most satisfying things that happened during your term? Why were they so satisfying?

- What were some of the most enjoyable things that happened?

- How have you grown during this term?

- What has God done in your life this term?

- How did your fellow missionaries help you grow?

- What did you like the most about your fellow missionaries?

- What did you like the most about the nationals?

- If you are married, what good things happened in your family?

- How do the above fit with the rest of your life story, with previous chapters in your life?

- How do you see God using these good experiences as stepping stones into the next chapter of your life?

- What were some things you dreaded that turned out to be good?

Often those who have the hardest time reentering their passport culture are the ones who had the most terrific time while on the field. If you now feel loneliness, frustration, fear, confusion and so forth, remember that such feelings may lead to insight and personal growth. What good things are you leaving behind (losing) that you are grieving for?

- Your Bible study group that has been your support for the last three years?
- Your identity as a church planter, seminary professor, English teacher, etc...?
- Fellowship with colleagues, nationals, etc...?
- Stability of home (what has become home)..?
- Certainty of your role?

- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---

What good things are you bringing with you?

- New family member by birth, marriage, adoption, etc. ...?
- Deeper faith in God and confidence in his working through you?
- New skills in relating to others?
- A larger view of the world and its needs?

- ---
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- ---

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Chapter 3

Closing the Last Chapter: Part II— Leaving Difficult Things

In addition to all the “good” things in the last chapter are the “bad” things that came into your life. Even though we want to leave these things behind, sometimes we have difficulty doing it. We may want to forget about some, but events keep occurring to remind us of them. We may feel ashamed of others, and we keep reminding ourselves of those. To continue the transition process and really leave them behind us, we usually have to recall them, think about them, and place them in the perspective of our whole life story.

Paul and Barnabas talked not only about the good things that had happened but also about the difficult things. Luke also recorded some of these difficult things right along with the good things.

- While they were in Perga (in Pamphylia), John Mark left them to return to his passport country (Acts 13:13) before they moved on to Antioch (in Pisidia). Since they were shorthanded, Paul and Barnabas probably felt overworked and abandoned, and later they had some relationship problems about this. Paul had not yet left it behind.
- Still filled with the Holy Spirit, when they were deported from Antioch (in Pisidia), they shook off the dust from their feet in protest and went on to Iconium (Acts 13:50-52). Paul and

Barnabas knew the pain of being rejected by the very people to whom they had come to minister.

- In Iconium they found out about a plot to harm them, so they fled to Lystra (Acts 14:5-6). Paul and Barnabas experienced danger, fear and evacuation.
- In Lystra Paul was stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead (Acts 14:19).

You may have been to your “Antiochs,” “Pergas,” “Iconiums,” and “Lystras.” Take time to look at your debrief form and look for those difficult times. Paul wrote in more detail about these times in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. These are listed below for you to check off in the squares how many you have experienced yourself. Then on the blank lines at the end of Paul’s list, add additional ones you have experienced.

- Worked hard
- In prison
- Exposed to death
- Beaten
- Stoned
- Shipwrecked
- Adrift in the sea
- Constantly on the move
- In danger from rivers
- In danger from bandits
- In danger from his own countrymen
- In danger from the nationals
- In danger in the city
- In danger in the country
- In danger at sea
- In danger from false brothers
- Labored
- Toiled
- Went without sleep
- Hungry

- Thirsty
- Cold
- Without clothes
- “Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Sometimes it is difficult to close a chapter and leave such things behind emotionally, but it can be done. Paul had done this by the time he wrote Timothy. Paul wrote about his life, purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, and sufferings all in one sentence—good and bad alike. In fact he specifically mentioned the difficulties he endured “in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra” (2 Timothy 3:10-11). He finished by saying, “Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.”

Take time to go back a second time through Paul’s list as well as the items you have added. Check in the circles all those that still bother you. This is a good time to bring closure to them. If you do not do it now, these items may follow you into the next chapter of your life and become stumbling blocks there. Go back to the circles you have checked to consider some of the same questions you did about the good things in the last chapter.

- How did these difficult things lead to growth in your life?

- How did God use the difficulties in your life

- How did your fellow missionaries help you grow in those difficult times?

- How do these difficult circumstances fit with the rest of your life story, with previous chapters in your life?

- How do you see God using these difficult experiences as stepping stones into the next chapter of your life?

Issues that are the most difficult to close are often those involving other people, people who were given advantages you thought you deserved, people who said things about your spouse, and especially people you saw as mistreating your children. Cross-cultural transitions often bring these issues of “unfinished business” to a head as we see in the life of Jacob. Although listed as one of the “heroes of the faith” in Hebrews 11, Jacob did not know how to “leave well.” Coming from a dysfunctional family and producing a dysfunctional family himself, Jacob was more likely to sneak off without even saying goodbye than he was to seek forgiveness and reconciliation.

- He slipped out of his passport country under threat of death from his brother (Genesis 27:41-28:2).
- He attempted to slip out of his host country without resolving serious disagreements with his father-in-law and brothers-in-law (Genesis 31:1-21).

- He was in great fear and distress, praying that God would save him from his brother, as he reentered his passport country (Genesis 32:1-12).

Although filled with deceit like Jacob’s family, Laban’s family made attempts at reconciliation (following a warning by God himself).

- Laban followed Jacob for a week and finally caught up with him (Genesis 31:22-24).
- Laban was prepared to spend some time with Jacob (Genesis 31:25).
- Laban confronted Jacob about leaving secretly without even letting him say good-bye to his daughters and grandchildren (Genesis 31:26-30).
- After a long discussion about the issues dividing them (Genesis 31:31-43), Laban said, “Come now, let’s make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us” (Genesis 31:44).
- They committed the disagreement to God and made promises to each other asking God to hold them accountable for keeping those promises(Genesis 31:49-53).
- They ate together, stayed until the next day, and then each left for home (Genesis 31:54-32:2).

As he neared his passport country, Jacob took three more steps that are often helpful in reconciliation.

- He sent mediators to his brother (Genesis 32:3-6). This is often helpful, especially if there is great hostility.
- He again prayed to God (Genesis 32:9-12). This is always appropriate and necessary.
- He selected gifts from what he had and sent them on ahead (Genesis 32:13-20).

Reconciliation is always the goal. Jesus told us that if God reminds us of an offended friend while worshipping, we are to first go and be reconciled, then come back and worship (Matthew 5:23-24).

However, since reconciliation involves two people, it is not always possible if the other person refuses. Paul wrote, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18).

Who (if anyone) do you believe God wants you to see personally for reconciliation? This would be someone you can meet face to face.

Who (if anyone) do you believe God wants you to call on the phone for reconciliation? You can call people anywhere in the country for three or four cents a minute (www.bigzoo.com and www.suiteone.com), and many cell phones have free minutes every month.

Who (if anyone) do you believe God wants you to write an e-mail for reconciliation? This can be done at no cost anywhere in the world.

Who (if anyone) do you believe God wants you to write a letter for reconciliation? This can be done for less than a dollar anywhere in the world.

Although reconciliation is not always possible, forgiveness is because it involves only one person—you. Not only is it possible, but it is also repeatedly commanded by God. Forgiveness can be granted even if the person who has wronged you does not request it. Granting forgiveness frees you to get on with your life, to go on to the next chapter. Consider others in Jacob’s family.

- Esau, who at one time was considering killing Jacob (Genesis 27:41-42), could have nursed that grudge for 20 years. However without any request from Jacob, Esau had granted forgiveness to him as indicated by Esau’s greeting in Genesis 33:4-9.
 - He ran to meet Jacob.
 - He embraced him.
 - He threw his arms around his neck.
 - He kissed him.
 - He wept with him.
 - He asked about his family
 - He called him “brother.”
 - He refused the gifts, saying he had plenty.
- Joseph, who witnessed the reunion of his father with Uncle Esau (Genesis 33:1-2), learned the lesson of forgiveness well. Although 10 of his brothers plotted to kill him and finally sold him as a slave, he did not hold it against them. Even though living near him in their host country of Egypt for more than 15 years, they had apparently never asked for forgiveness. Again, as

they had 39 years earlier, they made up a story—this time about what Jacob had said (Genesis 50:15-17). Joseph’s response shows us that he had granted forgiveness even without being asked.

- You wanted to harm me.
- God intended it for good.
- It accomplished the saving of many lives.
- Don’t be afraid.
- I will provide for you and your children.
- He reassured them.
- He spoke kindly to them.

Forgiving is sometimes a very difficult, but necessary, thing to do. Consider some of the following facts about forgiveness.

- Forgiveness literally means “to give up.”
- The dictionary defines it as “to give up all claim to exact punishment for an offence.”
- Forgiveness is repeatedly commanded in Scripture.
- Once you have granted forgiveness, you can never bring that offence up again.
- In the Lord’s Prayer we ask God to forgive us as we forgive others.
- Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, but that memory no longer has control over us, and it does not bring the same pain.
- Forgiveness does not mean the offender becomes your friend (reconciliation), although that may happen.

Are there some people you need to forgive? Perhaps you have not given up all claim to exact punishment on some of the following people.

- Family Members
 - Father or mother?
 - Sister or brother?
 - Child of yours?
 - Aunt or uncle?

- Stepparent?
- Others in your agency
 - Fellow missionary?
 - Field director
 - Homeland administrator?
 - Board member?
- Nationals
 - Teacher?
 - Pastor?
 - Student?
 - Housekeeper?

Continue to work on considering how all these difficult things are fitting into your life story. Paul wrote about this in Romans 8:28. If you love God and are called according to his purpose, you know that God works in all things (even bad things) for good. When you have granted forgiveness so that you feel it in your heart like you know it in your head, you are ready to go on to the next chapter—one in which God will take what Satan meant to be stumbling blocks and turn them into stepping stones.

Chapter 4

Stuck between Chapters: Being a Transient

You may have brought the previous chapter of your life to a close, but you have still not really started the next chapter. Sometimes writers get “stuck” between chapters; they have trouble getting started on the next one. They sometimes feel frustrated because they want to get on with their book, but they just cannot get going.

An athlete on a trapeze wanting to switch to the next trapeze has to let go of the current one to reach the next one. For a few seconds the athlete is just suspended in air with nothing to hold on to. When you leave the culture where you have been serving a term and start home, you also find yourself in the same position. You have left one place, and you are not yet in another. You are not where (and who) you were, but you are not yet where (and who) you will be. There is nothing to hold on to, and you may feel confused and disoriented.

You may think that this is happening just because it is your first time to reenter your passport culture, but even experienced missionaries may feel that way. We see the apostle Paul at the end of his third term of service in Acts 20:36-21:1. He describes his good-byes as including that he:

- Knelt down.
- Prayed.
- Wept.
- Embraced.
- Kissed.
- Grieved.
- Tore himself away.
- Put out to sea.

Although your body may have arrived in your passport country, your “mind” may still be “out to sea,” not mentally unpacked yet. Part of unpacking is leaving behind the things we talked about in the last chapter. Another part is bringing out the old “rules” of your passport culture that you packed away months or years ago. They include everything about how to do things at “home,” including everything from what to wear to how to make a purchase. You expect to experience jet lag when you cross several time zones quickly, and you expect to take about a week before the systems of your body are once more synchronized so that they are functioning in unison. What you may not expect is a psychological “jet lag” during which you may feel confused or disoriented, like you got lost on a detour on the way home and cannot find your bearings.

At the end of his “grieving goodbye,” Paul “put out to sea.” During his trip he had at least two or three weeks to transition, to unpack his mind. He had to sail 400-500 miles followed by a week’s layover in Tyre as well as “a number of days” in Caesarea (Acts 21:1-15). With today’s airliners we would “hit the ground running” in Jerusalem two or three hours later, having little or no time to unpack our minds.

Perhaps you need to just take some time while you are “out to sea” to consider some of the following.

- Changing cultures means that the rules have changed in your “game of life.” How have the rules changed for you? Perhaps while you were gone some of the rules changed in your passport culture, so consider those as well.

- When you do not understand the rules, you may feel like things are out of control (See Appendix). What can you do to learn the rules so that you can stop feeling like you are at the mercy of others?

- Genesis 1:2 notes that the earth was “formless and empty, darkness was over the surface....” If your life seems to be formless, empty, and dark as you are between chapters, remember the rest of the verse is “... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” The Creator may want to create something new in your life out of the chaos you feel. What might He want to create in you now?

- Write those ideas down here. If you do not, you will probably forget them when you again get caught up in the rat race of life and your old defenses return. Write them down now even if they seem to be impossible.

- Try something new. This time of transition is a great time to experiment instead of saying “I can’t do that,” or “I’ve never done it that way before.” What is the best idea you wrote down above? What can you do to actually try it?

- List some passing thoughts you have had during this time of transition. These may be about what you might do, where you might go, changes you might make in your life, etc. Remember that these may be from the Spirit hovering over you in this time when life seems dark, empty, and formless. God sometimes speaks in a “still small voice.”

Chapter 5

Beginning the Next Chapter: Part I— Outlines and Outcomes

Paul, that first Christian missionary, states well how to make a new beginning in Philippians 3:13-15. “But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward that what is ahead, I press toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.”

Of course, Paul did not literally forget all that was behind. We saw earlier that he remembered a long list of hardships that he had endured, often including exactly how many times each had occurred. What he meant was not that they were taken from his memory, but that he no longer held on to them so that they kept him from getting into the next chapter of his life. Paul could have played the “victim” and said “If only....” about many things. Consider the following.

- Blaming circumstances
 - If only I hadn’t been shipwrecked
 - If only I hadn’t been stoned
 - If only I hadn’t been in danger in the city
 - If only I hadn’t been in prison (read Philippians 1:12-19 on this one)
- Blaming others
 - If only John Mark had not abandoned me on my first term

- If only Barnabas had not insisted on bringing his nephew on my second term
- If only others did not preach Christ out of
 - Envy
 - Rivalry
 - Selfish ambition
 - Insincerity
 - Stirring up trouble
 - (Read Philippians 1:18 on this one)
- Blaming himself
 - If only I hadn’t misjudged John Mark (Acts 15:38)
 - If only I hadn’t been so stubborn about not bringing John Mark (Acts 15:39)
 - If only I hadn’t become so troubled that I turned and cast the spirit out (Acts 16:18)
 - If only I hadn’t suffered and been insulted in Philippi (1 Thessalonians 2:2)

Instead of blaming anyone or anything, instead of holding on to any difficult things in his past, he said, “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press toward the goal....” If you have not let go of difficult things in your past, you will probably have increased problems in straining toward the goal God has for you. Holding on to those things may keep you from making much progress toward that goal. This is the time to let go of those difficult things and become the “victor” rather than the “victim.” This may take time, a confidant, a box of tissue, prayer, an altar, and so forth. However, when you have done it, instead of looking to the past with “If only...,” you can begin looking to the future with “If I do this....”

As you have looked back over the last chapter of your life and hesitated in the transition time between chapters, you may have had some thoughts about the next chapter. It is about time to begin outlining the next chapter in your life. Remember that an outline is only a guide, a rough plan for a first draft of the chapter. Sometimes

as you begin writing that new chapter, you may realize that the outline has to be changed, perhaps very dramatically. This happened to Paul

After settling a theological dispute that arose during their furlough, Paul and Barnabas begin to outline their second term. Paul said to Barnabas, “Let’s go back to all the towns (including Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra) where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” Barnabas apparently agreed and added that he “wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them.” However, Paul did not think that was a good idea.

Look at Paul’s original chapter “outline” in Acts 15:36, quoted above.

- Where did he plan to go? _____
- Who did he plan to take with him? _____
- What did he plan to do? _____

Now look at the actual outcome.

- Where did Paul finally go? (Acts 16:10) _____
- Who went with him? (Acts 15:40) _____
- What did he do? (Acts 16:11-18:22) _____

At the end of his third term (Acts 20:16) Paul was in a hurry to get back to Jerusalem, so much of a hurry that he bypassed one of his favorite churches. However, even at that time as a seasoned missionary, he did not know what was in the future: “And now compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there...”(20:22-24 read the next few verses). What would he tell his supporters?

What will you tell yours?

Briefly outline the next five years of your life, knowing that everything must be kept open to change.

Most likely your outline contains some very wonderful scenarios. That is good for your expectations to major on the good. However, so that we will not be taken by surprise, Jesus told his disciples that some difficulties were likely to come into their lives as well. Although you do not have to put these in your outline, you need to be aware of these so that you do not feel like God has deserted you when they happen. Let us look at what Jesus had to say about the bad things that may happen to his workers.

Although it was not a cross-cultural assignment, Jesus orientation of his twelve disciples for their first assignment in Matthew 10 is illuminating.

- They were called (verse 1).
- They were given authority (verse 1).
- They were listed name by name (verses 2-4).
- They were given instructions:
 - Where to go (verses 5-6)
 - What to do (verses 7-8)
 - What to take (or not take) (verses 9-10)
 - How to start the work (verses 11-16)
 - What to expect (Verses 17-23)
 - Handed over to councils
 - Flogged

- Taken before governors and kings
- Betrayed by brothers
- Hated by everyone
- Persecuted
- Forced to evacuate

When the disciples came to him later and asked about the end of time, he gave them an orientation to what his disciples would face in those last times in Matthew 24:4-14. These include the following.

- Deceptions
- Wars
- Rumors of wars
- Nation rising against nation
- Famines
- Earthquakes
- Persecution
- Death
- Hatred by all nations
- Deserters of the faith
- Betrayal by those in the faith
- Hatred by those in the faith
- False prophets
- Love of most will grow cold
- “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached to the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (verse 14).

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How do these words of Jesus affect your tentative plans? What changes do they make in those plans?

Chapter 6

Beginning the Next Chapter Part II— Challenging Changes

As you begin to write the next chapter in your life, you may want to anticipate some of the things that could lead to difficulties in that chapter. One of the major obstacles you may encounter is change, or lack of change.

- You may have changed, but your passport country has not.
- Your passport country may have changed, but you have not.
- Both you and your passport country may have changed in opposite ways.

As we saw in Chapter 1, Paul and Barnabas had been commissioned and sent by their local church in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). After they had completed their first term of service, they returned to their local church in Antioch, called the church together, and reported all that God had done—that he had saved many Gentiles. They stayed on for some time at the church at Antioch, and apparently all was going well (Acts 14:26-28).

However, some men from Judea, the area around headquarters in Jerusalem, came to Antioch and were teaching that people could not be saved without being circumcised. Paul and Barnabas and these men debated the issue and got into a sharp dispute (Acts 15:1-2).

This issue must have surprised Paul and Barnabas because previously when uncircumcised people were saved often the question was not even raised. First, in Acts 8, Philip went to Samaria, did miracles, healed people, and everyone was happy. Even Simon, the sorcerer, believed and was baptized. When the administrators at headquarters in Jerusalem heard about the revival, they sent Peter and John to investigate. Upon their arrival, Peter and John prayed for the Samaritans and placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Peter and John preached the gospel in many Samaritan villages on the way back to Jerusalem. In verses 26-40, Philip explained the Word to the Ethiopian and baptized him. The question of circumcision did not even arise in these instances.

Second, in Acts 10 when Peter was preaching to a group of Gentiles at Caesarea, the Holy Spirit came on them, much to Peter’s surprise. Realizing that God did not discriminate, Peter ordered that they be baptized. When Peter got to Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 11, the circumcised believers criticized him for having fellowship with uncircumcised people. After he explained, there were no further questions about circumcision.

Third, the gospel spread further, and people came to Antioch preaching to the Gentiles who were saved in large numbers. Again when headquarters in Jerusalem heard about this, they sent Barnabas to Antioch to investigate. When he saw the evidence, he encouraged them to be true to the Lord. Then he looked for Saul (Paul), brought him to Antioch, for a full year the two of them met with the church there, and many people were saved. In fact, the church at Antioch sent famine relief to the people of Judea via Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11). Surely the questions about circumcision were finally all laid to rest.

Unfortunately, when Paul and Barnabas arrived in Antioch on home assignment at the end of their first term, the question arose again. When the local church in Antioch could not settle the matter, they sent Paul and Barnabas to headquarters in Jerusalem to again try

to get it settled. Of course, after much debate, the administrators at headquarters again "settled" the question and sent their decision back to Antioch in writing. (Acts 15).

This was a case of the missionaries, Paul and Barnabas, being changed because of their extensive contact with the Gentiles, but people (the Judiazers) back near headquarters not changing. The same kind of thing may well happen when people back in the sending country change, but the missionaries do not.

List ways you have changed.

- Theologically (broader view?)

- Socially (more or fewer family members?)

- Emotionally (more or less depressed?)

- Physically (cured of illness or have a new one?)

- World-view (broader or narrower?)

- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---

With our rapidly changing cultures these days, we also often find that our "home" culture has changed greatly while we were gone. List changes you have noticed in your passport country.

- Technologically

- Philosophically (postmodernism)

- Entertainment

- Drug use

- Sexual mores

- ---
- ---

- ---
- ---

How important are these changes to you?

Remember that “home” is not so much a “place” as it is a situation in which you are known and trusted, understood and accepted, have predictable rituals and routine interactions with people among whom you feel secure, relaxed, and free be yourself. If things have changed in your passport country, it will no longer feel like “home.”

- You may see many familiar faces, but few familiar people. They have changed.
- You may see familiar places, but they have been renovated and have new functions. They have changed.
- You may try familiar routines, but discover that you do not even know how to complete a purchase.

Nothing may come “naturally” any more so that you feel like an alien in your own country.

Feeling out of place back “home” may be much more alarming than when you felt out of place in a “foreign” country at the beginning of your term of service. You have become temporarily “homeless,” a marginal person functioning at the fringes of society, not at its core. The good news is that just as you became a part of your host culture, you can once again become a part of your passport culture if you wish to do so. As you write the next chapter of your life you can again feel like you are at home.

Appendix

Acculturation Problem

At the end of the manual describing mental disorders (DSM-IV) the American Psychiatric Association has a chapter titled “Other Conditions That May Be a Focus of Clinical Attention.” After 675 pages describing mental disorders, this brief chapter lists conditions that are NOT mental disorders, but they may be distressing to individuals or interfere with their functioning. These other conditions have a “V” before their code number, and they include the following as well as many others.

- V62.2 Occupational Problem
- V62.3 Academic Problem
- V62.4 Acculturation Problem
- V62.82 Bereavement
- V62.89 Religious or Spiritual Problem

Just as normal individuals may have a problem with work, with school, or with grief, they may also have an “Acculturation Problem.” The DSM-IV says only, “This category can be used when the focus of clinical attention is a problem involving adjustment to a different culture (e.g., following migration).” Although the DSM-IV does not elaborate on this problem experienced by normal people, a description of what it might be like for ordinary missionaries who reenter their passport countries is helpful. We have written the following description.

Acculturation Problem (The Reentry Transition)

Diagnostic Features

When reentering their passport culture many people experience the Acculturation Problem that some people have called “reverse culture shock.” During the time these people were in their host culture, both they and their passport culture have changed, so they become aliens in their own country. They find that, rather than feeling at home where there are routine interactions, predictable events, and few surprises, the environment is confusing and even disgusting or “wrong.” Rather than feeling safe and secure where they can trust their instincts and be themselves, they feel vulnerable, anxious, fearful, and always have to think about what they do. This is often disconcerting because if people do not feel like they belong at home, where do they belong?

Such people may experience great disappointment when their expectations are not met. They may become angry and then allow the anger to become resentment or bitterness. They may become alienated, critical, or maybe cynical. In their frustration they may withdraw from people, even family, so that they become isolated and lonely. They may find themselves being easily offended, judgmental about their home culture, and even depressed. They may become angry at their culture for the great materialism they see, especially the great wastefulness as they see “good, useable” things discarded. These feelings are typically greater if the people had a wonderful time in their host culture and less if they had a difficult time.

Christian missionaries may become disillusioned by the church in their passport country, even by their “home church.” As one returning missionary put it, “Our church is comatose and doesn’t even know it.” Experiencing the different worship styles, they sense a

lack of spirituality in the churches they visit. When there is little response to their impassioned pleas for help for people in their host culture, they may perceive a great apathy in the church in general.

When returning home, they may see familiar faces, but not familiar people. Both they and the people they knew have changed. “Familiar” places are not familiar any more. When returning to the same church, they find that the people there are not really the same anymore; they have little in common, and they cannot break into the group again. People back home seem to have such narrow perspectives on events, and the returning ones do not know where they fit, so they sense that they are forming temporary relationships. They miss the closeness of the expatriate community in their host culture when returning to a culture that places the emphasis on the individual. They may misinterpret gestures and other “signals” so that they become marginal people who must initiate relationships rather than being sought out.

Of course, they must remember that loneliness and unpleasantness are often the beginning of insight and personal growth. In a sense they have become cultural hybrids who are temporarily homeless, at home in neither their passport culture nor in their host culture. However, when they are able to put their cross-cultural experience in perspective and see how it relates to their whole life story, they usually find out that they can still hold on to their new values and attitudes and once again feel at home in their passport culture.

Associated Features and Problems

Several other problems may occur simultaneously with the Acculturation Problem. Since the nature of work is likely to change following repatriation, a V62.2 Occupational Problem may occur. Returning to their passport country people often find their work increasing in security but decreasing in significance. Instead of being

in charge, they often are expected to blend into their agency with everyone else. Likewise schools are likely to be different for children and adolescents. Instead of home schooling or schools with small classes, they may find themselves in large schools with a resulting V62.3 Academic Problem. Note that these are V-codes, and not mental disorders.

Religious people may develop a V62.89 Religious or Spiritual Problem. Religious people may experience the normal anger, cynicism and depression and come to the conclusions that something is wrong with their religion. Even though nothing is wrong, this can lead to a spiritual problem. Missionaries in particular changing from “religious work” to raising money may feel guilty about not doing what God had called them to. Again note that this is a V-code, and not a mental disorder.

Mental disorders such as a 300.02 Generalized Anxiety Disorder or a 296.2 Major Depressive Disorder may develop if the normal anxiety or depression associated with an Acculturation Problem lasts for an extended period of time. These are mental disorders and individuals with these long-term problems should seek help from a mental health professional.

Specific Culture, Age, and Gender Features

Children are often quite verbal about not wanting to return to their parents’ passport country, but they usually adjust quite rapidly. The younger they are, the more rapidly they adjust. Within a few days or weeks younger children make new friends and are playing happily with them.

Adolescents, likewise, may not want to return. Relationships with one’s peers are extremely important during the teen years. Suddenly leaving peers and trying to break into a new group in a society of teenagers can be a very difficult task, so adolescents may

want to avoid it and have great difficulty when forced to do so. This may involve acting out and result in getting into serious trouble.

Relationships are also very important to women. Giving up a close-knit group of friends on the field and trying to find like-minded women in her passport country may be difficult, especially since many may be working.

Men are more likely to experience a loss of identity as their job changes. On the field they may be involved in anything from church planting to construction to teaching. On home assignment they are often on the road raising funds to go back. As one man put it he was going through “making a difference withdrawal.” On the field he made the difference between life and death, but back home, if he were not there, people in need could just go to someone else.

Familial Pattern

What we call “reentry” for missionary kids may not be reentry at all, but really entry to a “foreign” country. That is, they are entering the country from which their parents came, but they have never really lived there any length of time themselves. They may have visited grandparents and other relatives there briefly, but real home for them is what their parents call their host country. Thus, their Acculturation Problem is one of entry, not reentry.

Prevalence

Experiencing the Acculturation Problem upon reentry is very common in that about two-thirds of the people who return to their passport country experience significant discomfort. The other one-third reenter with little difficulty beyond a relatively rapid adjustment to technological changes. People usually expect an Acculturation Problem when entering their host culture because of the widely used term “culture shock.” However, upon returning to their passport

culture many people are surprised to find that there is a “reverse culture shock,” and that it is often even a more difficult adjustment.

Acculturation Problems may occur each time one changes cultures. Some people report each successive reentry becomes easier, probably because they expect the problems and have learned how to adapt to them. Other people find successive reentries more difficult, particularly if the latter ones involve leaving children and/or grandchildren in the host country.

Course

Each episode typically includes three stages: leaving, “in between,” and entering. The “**leaving**” stage begins several weeks or months before actual departure when the missionaries start anticipating the return “home” and separating from the work in the host country. This stage is marked by receiving attention and recognition from others at receptions; saying goodbye to persons, places, and pets; withdrawing from their work as they turn it over to others, and generally bringing closure to their time on the field. At this time they are disengaging from their past and turning their attention toward their future. They may be in denial that it is already time to return and have feelings of rejection, resentment and sadness.

The “**in between**” stage begins when the missionaries leave for the airport and end when they unpack their minds, not their suitcases. During this time they are without status, structure, and even keys. In this time of chaos they may feel overwhelmed and isolated, as well as exaggerating their problems. Their self-esteem may drop and they may become anxious over the future and grieving over their losses in the recent past.

The “**entering**” stage begins when the missionaries have unpacked their minds and continues until the missionaries have re-engaged with their passport culture. During this time they realize that

they are marginal persons and are in rather superficial, tentative relationships. Reentering missionaries may misinterpret verbal and nonverbal behaviors and make errors in responding. They may feel vulnerable, fearful, and may be easily offended. They may find it difficult to trust people and even experience depression. Some experience a “honeymoon” period immediately after they reenter when everything is seen through rose-colored glasses. Then this may be followed by a period of disillusionment when everything is viewed through rust-colored glasses so that they notice materialism and superficiality in their home culture. During this time they may become angry, judgmental, bitter, lonely, fearful and isolated.

This entering stage may take only a few months, or a year (a full annual cycle), or never be completed. Some missionaries are unable to complete this stage and remain disillusioned for the rest of their lives. Some return to their host culture after retirement to spend their final days there.

Some say that people know they have fully reentered their passport culture when they do the following things.

- They stop carrying toilet paper everywhere.
- They are not afraid to swallow water while showering.
- They do not get nervous when they eat lettuce.
- They drink water with ice in it.
- They buy cherries or grapes along the highway and eat them.
- They use tissues to blow their noses.

Again note that an Acculturation Problem is not a mental disorder, but people who do experience it should know that it is *normal*. Those who do not have similar reactions, thoughts, or feelings need to be aware of the problems other normal missionaries face. Also note that the above description is written for this booklet—all the DSM-IV says about it is “This category can be used when the focus of clinical attention is a problem involving adjustment to a different culture (e.g., following migration).”

Recommended Reentry Reading

Jordan, Peter. (1992). *Re-Entry: Making the Transition from Missions to Life at Home*. YWAM Publishing, P.O. Box 55787, Seattle, WA, 98155. (Written by a missionary for returning missionaries)

Storti, Craig. (2002). *The Art of Coming Home*. Intercultural Press, Inc. P. O. Box 700, Yarmouth, ME. (Written by a Peace Corps volunteer specializing in cross-cultural adjustment and repatriation)

Pascoe, Robin. (2000). *Homeward Bound: A Spouse’s Guide to Repatriation*. Expatriate Press, 1430 Terrace Avenue, North Vancouver, BC, Canada V7R 1B4. (Written for women in reentry)

Miller, Susan. (1995). *After the Boxes Are Unpacked: Moving on After Moving in*. A focus on the family book published by Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60189. (Written for women moving in our mobile society, but applicable to returning missionaries as well)

Pirollo, Neal. (2000). *The Reentry Team: Caring for Your Returning Missionaries*. Emmaus Road International, 7150 Tanner Court, San Diego, CA 92111. (858) 929-7020. (Best available to give to your church—helpful to read yourself)

Pirollo, Neal (1991). *Serving As Senders*. Emmaus Road International 7150 Tanner Court, San Diego, CA 92111. (858) 929-7020. (Excellent general book for your church, includes reentry as well as many other topics)