

Five Reasons Not To Leave The Country

If you don't want to grow, by all means, stay home!

By Paul Borthwick

Warning!

An opportunity awaits you that could turn your world upside down. It could challenge your concept of what it means to follow Christ. It could blow away your beliefs about what brings true joy. You could end up doing things you never thought possible. You could encounter situations where you're forced to rely on God's strength, not your own.

People will warn you that when you come back, you'll never be the same. And they'll be right.

So if you want to be comfortable where you are ... if you want to live challenge free ... if you want to keep your values and lifestyle unaltered, don't even think about going on a short-term missions trip. Because if you do, the following disturbing effects are almost certain to befall you.

1. Your view of God will explode.

A Ugandan Christian leader who hosted a short-term missions team from our church told me: "We need to meet each other because without our cross-cultural fellowship, we both stay fixed in our own cultural views of God. When we meet and share our lives, we discover that God is greater than either of our cultures. He is not a tribal god or an ethnic god or a national god. He is the transcendent God of the universe!"

We're all instinctively ethnocentric, believing that the world revolves around our country or culture. As a result, we're prone to worship a God who looks like us, speaks our language, and appreciates the worship styles that we appreciate. When we leave home, we confront people whose God speaks another language. Their worship services might be two or three times longer and louder than we are accustomed to.

Cross-cultural travel and relationships exploded my view of God. When I visited Christians in China, I realized that He speaks every language. While serving in megacities, I've been stunned with the amazing truth that He knows every one of the six billion inhabitants on earth by name. Cross-cultural worship services have made me marvel that He really

is "Lord of the nations." Hearing the testimony of Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and secular converts has given me a fresh view of the universal application of the good news of Jesus Christ.

If we desire a god who fits tidily into our own cultural boxes, then we'd better stay away from cross-cultural missions trips. Ministry across cultures will transform our view of God.

2. You'll view your possessions differently.

We know intellectually that many parts of the world are much poorer than where we live, but staying at home keeps such knowledge at an intellectual level and at an emotional distance.

When we go to a poor barrio, inner city, orphanage, or refugee camp, we confront this knowledge experientially. We may feel guilt over how much we have back home and how little others have. We're confronted with the challenge of 1 John 3:17 *"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?"*

On the positive side, confronting our materialism helps us recognize what really matters. A

team of young couples went to serve in a church in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. They saw incredibly poor Christians rejoicing and singing at the top of their lungs, with a depth of joy that challenged the visitors' faith. Is our faith simply a nice "topping" on our materialistic lifestyle? they wondered. They saw that although they possessed much more, their faith was not nearly as deep as that of the Haitians.

One couple returned home, moved to a smaller apartment, sold some "stuff," and taught a Sunday school class on *"Living More Simply Than Others May Simply Live."* They changed some of their habits and saved a few dollars that allowed them to give a few dollars each month to support an AIDS orphan. Their direct encounter with poor brothers and sisters helped them reevaluate their lifestyle in relation to the faith.

But maybe cross-cultural service is just the kind of challenge you've been looking for to jump-start your growth. Maybe you're ready for a broader view of God and a deeper understanding of the body of Christ. Maybe you've sensed it's time to evaluate your lifestyle and deepen your faith.

3. Your perspective on hardship will change.

Most of us think that life is already tough. An obstinate boss, an overpriced house, monthly car payments, and too many credit-card bills present us with sufficiently significant challenges, or so we think. A missions trip into the poorer parts of the world or among brothers and sisters who have suffered under totalitarian regimes changes our perceptions.

One couple went on a winter trip to serve among a poor congregation in an Eastern European country. They stayed in the pastor's unheated apartment. They listened as he recounted experiences of being followed, harassed, and detained by the Communist government on multiple occasions. He challenged the couple's perspective on joy as he told them of the Bible study he started in the "reeducation camp" and the efforts he made to reach out to secret police.

When they returned home, the couple decided they would try to stop complaining. They taped the phrase "*No more whining*" on their bulletin board in the kitchen. Their lives no longer seemed so hard now that they'd encountered the joy and courage of persecuted believers.

4. You'll gain a new view of heaven.

Serving on a short-term, cross-cultural missions trip foreshadows the multicultural, multiethnic church depicted in Revelation 7:9, in which people from every nation, tribe, people group, and language worship Jesus in heaven. Cross-cultural worship helps us experience the reality of Galatians 3:28 – that in Christ there is "*neither Jew nor Greek*." It enlarges our understanding of the creative diversity of God.

Worshiping with Koreans has challenged my fervor in prayer. Singing with Haitians has enabled me to experience true anticipation of heaven. Listening to testimonies from new believers in Nepal has helped me understand the awesome grace of God's forgiveness. Being with these believers intensifies my anticipation of heavenly worship.

The incredible growth of the church of Jesus Christ in Latin America, Africa, and Asia over the last century means that heaven will be predominantly nonwhite and non-Western. Cross-cultural service gives us a taste of heavenly worship.

5. Your faith will stretch.

Serving cross-culturally puts us into a "must trust" environment where we realize that we're no longer in

control. Our prayers intensify – whether for finances, safety, health, or communication because we cannot resolve these issues without God's deliverance.

At Grace Chapel in Lexington, Massachusetts, more than 80 youth and adults participate in short-term missions every summer. When asked about their growth, a vast majority of participants will say something like, "*The trip to Moldova taught me to pray*," or "*I trusted God for the money I needed, and God miraculously provided*," or "*We relied on God for safety while in Venezuela, and He took care of us every step of the way*."

They testify that their faith was stretched. Unpredictable situations, unfamiliar foods, and being asked to minister in areas in which they did not feel confident forced them to depend on God instead of themselves.

Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission more than 100 years ago, said, "*Unless there is an element of risk in our exploits for God, there is no need for faith*." Cross-cultural service provides plenty of faith-stretching risk.

Go for the growth.

Warning! An opportunity awaits you that could turn your world, your faith, your view of God, and your perspective on the future upside down!

Do you really want to do this? It might be uncomfortable. It might be challenging. Some say it's fanatical.

But maybe cross-cultural service is just the kind of challenge you've been looking for to jump-start your growth. Maybe you're ready for a broader view of God and a deeper understanding of the body of Christ. Maybe you've sensed it's time to evaluate your lifestyle and deepen your faith.

If so, then begin exploring opportunities for cross-cultural service. But be sure you're ready, because it will change your life!

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