

Reentry after Short-Term Missionary Service

Ronald L. Koteskey

Member Care Consultant
GO InterNational

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Ronald L. Koteskey
122 Lowry Lane
Wilmore, KY 40390
USA

ron@missionarycare.com

www.missionarycare.com

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Preface

Several years ago Bonnie and I wrote *Coming “Home”:* *The Reentry Transition* to use in our reentry retreats for people returning to their passport cultures after serving in other cultures for several years. We wrote that book for people to read after they had returned to their passport country. Later I wrote *We’re Going Home: Reentry for Elementary Children* and an accompanying book, *I Don’t Want to Go Home: Parent’s Guide for Reentry for Elementary Children*. Still later I wrote a book for people to use months before leaving their host country, *Before You Get “Home”:* *Preparing for Reentry*

Although I have written several books about reentry for people to use during different phases of their return and for different people, none are for those returning after a short-term mission trip. Though there are many more people returning from short-term service and the issues these people face are quite different from those returning from long-term periods of service, there are far fewer resources available to help them sort out those issues.

Since the course of my life was changed by my own short-term service in 1989, I am including an autobiographical section in each chapter. Readers may be interested in this personal material, or they may prefer to skip it altogether.

I want to thank Larry Frick, Bert Jones, Art Nonneman, and Yvonne Moulton for the excellent suggestions about the material in this book.

Chapter 1

Short-Term Service

People who drive across the border into a neighboring culture for a day of shopping probably do not need to be concerned about reentry. Likewise, people who fly to a vacation spot in another country and spend time seeing the major tourist attractions are not likely to need preparation for reentry. Such people usually do not get out of “vacation” mode because they are interested primarily in sightseeing or relaxing and make only a superficial acquaintance with the people or the culture they are visiting. The beliefs and behaviors of the nationals are curious and interesting but have little personal impact.

However, those who go to serve and interact personally with nationals may find their own assumptions about life and living challenged as well as their worldview broadened. Those who go to learn about and understand the everyday people living there may find themselves considering major changes in their own lives. They may realize that their own beliefs and behaviors are only one way of looking at things and that their worldview may be quite provincial.

What is Short-Term Service?

Short-term service is defined more by the intentions of people going than it is in exactly how long those people are gone. Short-term service may last weeks, months, or even a couple of years. People going short-term go intending to return to the same house or apartment, drive the same vehicle, work at the same job, attend the same church, and so forth. They view their time in the other culture as an interlude in their ongoing lives, never intending to enter fully that other culture. They plan to go for a limited time, complete a well-defined task, and then return to life at home.

Such service may be for a college student serving a week or two during spring break, for a brick layer serving in a warmer climate for a month or two when it is too cold for him to work at home, or for a teacher serving a year or two to fill in for one serving long-term but who needs to be gone temporarily. All these people serve knowing that they will return to pick up their lives where they left off. They do not intend to become part of their host culture.

Short-Term Service in Bible Times

Going from one culture to another is not a new phenomenon. For thousands of years people have visited neighboring cultures as anyone can verify by reading the first book of the Bible. God told Abram to leave his country, his people, and his family and go to Canaan. Abram obeyed. When a famine occurred there, Abram went on to Egypt for a while. Before long, Abram headed back toward Canaan (Genesis 12).

Jonah

The first short-term cross-cultural missionary recorded in the Bible, a rather reluctant one, was Jonah. When Jonah finally obeyed God and went to Nineveh, he was there only a few weeks. His first day there, he preached that within 40 days God would destroy the city. The people repented, and God did not do so. Jonah remained there a few more days angry with God because he wanted God to destroy the Ninevites, not reform and forgive them (Jonah 3-4).

Jesus' Apostles

Jesus sent his 12 apostles out on short-term home mission trips ahead of him. He called them together and specifically instructed them not to go to the Gentiles or to the Samaritans, but to people in Israel (Matthew 10:5-6). Of course, he noted that ultimately they would also reach governors, kings, and the Gentiles (Matthew 10:18). In our multicultural world, we find people of other cultural backgrounds in large city enclaves, in remote mountains such as Appalachia, and in recent immigrants, both legal and illegal, across the country.

Paul

Although Paul was gone for long periods of time on his missionary journeys, he planted churches in some places during short-term stays. During his first term of service, on the first Sabbath Paul was in Antioch (in Pisidia), Paul was asked to speak in the synagogue. He was invited back the next week, but then he was run out of town after he did so (Acts 13:13-52). During his second term of service, Paul spoke three Sabbath days in Thessalonica and was then run out of town (Acts 17:1-10). Thus his first time in these cities was for only two or three weeks.

Short-Term Service Today

What is new today is that people in many countries can travel to cultures on every continent in a matter of hours, spend a week or two ministering there, and return home again in a matter of hours. These people have no intention of learning the language or culture. They do not intend to stay an extended period of time or return to the same culture ever again. Many thousands do this each year.

Many mission agencies offer short-term service not only because it helps nationals on their fields, but also because it may result in those planning to serve only a few weeks or months becoming much more interested in mission work after they return. Such people often increase their giving and praying; and some even return for further service, both short- and long-term.

My Story

In 1989 Bonnie (my wife) and I wanted to do something to celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary, so we decided to go on a two-week mission trip to help build a church in southern Brazil. Less than 24 hours after our plane took off we were on the ground in Sao Paulo. We had never traveled outside of North America and did not even know enough to buy and read some sort of guidebook. All we knew was that we were going to Iguassu Falls to help build a church. For several years a fellow Sunday school teacher had been telling us we ought to go on a mission trip. This one fit our schedule and our budget.

Though we had contributed to missions and prayed for missionaries throughout our marriage, we had never felt any "call" to serve in missions. In fact, our trip was advertised as a

“vacation with a purpose.” As far as we were concerned, this was a one-time venture to celebrate our anniversary, and we would return to our work at Asbury College. Our group of 16 people from Kentucky, Texas, Washington, Pennsylvania, and Missouri met each other for the first time in Miami International Airport. We had never met anyone in the group except the leader, and we knew little else except for some health information and the fact that we were going to help build a church. We were on our way to our “vacation with a purpose” with one other couple, two women, and ten men.

We had not even read about where we were going, but we assumed it was some place out in the jungle. Our purpose was to help build a little church for people in a village near a waterfall. We were on our way to an adventure to help others; then we expected to return home and life would go on as usual.

Your Story

Now consider your story. The following questions will help guide your thinking. If you are reading this book before you go on a short-term mission trip, answer the questions about your plans. If you have already completed your short-term service answer the questions about what you actually did.

- Where do you plan to go? (or Where did you go?) Note more than just the name of the country. Describe your place of service: rural or urban, hot or cold, wet or dry, sunny or cloudy, friendly or distant, wealthy or poor, and so forth.

- What do you plan to do? (or What did you do?) Briefly describe your service, such as building a church, remodeling a house, conducting a Vacation Bible School, digging a well, singing in church services, teaching a Bible course, and so forth.

- Why are you going? (or Why did you go?) List as many reasons as are applicable, such as to enjoy travel, to deduct airfare and other expenses on tax returns, to please God, to obey God’s call, to get away from it all, and so forth.

- What did you do to prepare? List things such as read a guidebook, talked with someone who served there, did nothing, Googled the country, talked with an international student from there, and so forth.

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- What do you expect to get from this short-term service? (or What did you expect to get from this short-term service?) List things such as satisfaction in serving others, relief from feeling guilty about having so much, a deeper walk with God, a break from your regular life, and so forth.
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Chapter 2

Preparing for Reentry

Preparing for reentry from a short-term missionary service to your passport begins as soon as you enter your host country because you will probably be held accountable by those who sent you. Those people have invested time, prayer, and money in your going and they want to know what you have done and experienced. This is a part of good stewardship on their part.

Preparing for Reentry in Bible Times

Jonah

Jonah did not prepare for a good reentry. From the beginning he resisted God's call on his life, and at the end he was still hoping that God would destroy the people to whom he had ministered.

- When God told him to go east, Jonah went west, to run away from God (Jonah 1:1-3).
- When in a desperate situation, Jonah called on God for help. Jonah was thankful when God helped, but, as far as we know, he never repented (Jonah 2).

- When he delivered God’s message about the destruction of Nineveh, he hoped it would really happen (Jonah 3-4).
- Jonah was very unhappy that God did not destroy Nineveh, and he became angry with God (Jonah 4).

Jonah’s story ended before telling us whether or not he ever reentered his passport culture. The last thing we read about him is that he is angry with God.

Jesus’ Apostles

The last chapter pointed out that Jesus told the apostles where to go on their short-term service. He also told them what to do.

- Preach this message: The kingdom of heaven is near (Matthew 10:7, Luke 9:2).
- Heal the sick (Matthew 10:8, Luke 9:1-2)
- Raise the dead (Matthew 10:8).
- Drive out demons (Matthew 10:8, Luke 9:1).

Then Jesus oriented them by giving specific instructions as to how to go about their service, such as what to take, where to stay, and how to interact with the local nationals. The apostles then carried out their preaching and healing ministries as Jesus had instructed.

When they completed their time of service, the apostles returned and gathered around Jesus. (Mark 6:30, Luke 9:10)

- They reported to him what they had done and taught (Mark 6:30, Luke 9:10).
- Jesus invited them to a quiet place by themselves to get some rest (Mark 6:31).
- They withdrew by themselves to a solitary place (Bethsaida) (Mark 6:32, Luke 9:10).

Of course, they did not report to Jesus because he needed to know. 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” (Luke 9:10). 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. Also, your church would like to know what you did while you were gone.

Paul

The same thing happened several years later when Paul and Barnabas returned to the Church at Antioch from cross-cultural service. The church there had fasted and prayed, commissioned Paul and Barnabas by placing hands on them, and sent them off (Acts 13: 1-3).

When Paul and Barnabas completed their work they returned to Antioch (Acts 14:26).

- They gathered the church together (Acts 14:27).
- They reported all that God had done with them (Acts 14:27).
- They reported how God had received the Gentiles (Acts 14:27).

When Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem to help settle a theological question, they reported on these two topics. First, as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria between Antioch and Jerusalem, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles to churches along the way (Acts 15:3). Second, when they arrived at headquarters, they reported what God had done with them (Acts 15:4).

Preparing for Reentry Today

As in Bible times, people serving cross-culturally today are responsible to those who have sent them. Senders today want to know much the same thing that Paul and Barnabas reported. First, they expect a report about what has happened to those they have supported. Second, they expect a report about what has happened to the nationals served. We human beings seem to have a need to know how God continues to act in the world. We want to be reassured that God empowers people “like us” to work effectively and receive joy when we are outside our comfort zones.

My Story

When Bonnie and I went on that first short-term trip to Brazil, we did nothing to prepare for reentry except to take pictures and gather a few things to put in a scrapbook. Of course, we bought a few souvenirs to place around the house as well. We have a bottle of water, a small Brazilian flag, a gourd and straw people used to make and drink their tea all day, and a stuffed piranha. These are all still on display in our basement family room.

As we left our host country, we did say our goodbyes. Bonnie wrote, “In our last Sunday morning service everyone was crying and hugging. There were times we could not speak a word. Our hearts were just full of love for each other and parting was so difficult. It was like leaving our family back home.” She also wrote, “As we were flying back to the United States, we both said that in the future at least part of our summers would be spent on some mission field.”

I wrote, “After working, eating, and having fun with the people for two weeks, we did not even want to leave. We were totally unprepared for how difficult it would be to say goodbye.

Even though we are quite unemotional people, the tears flowed freely that last Sunday morning.”

Your Story

You are just writing your story, and you have an opportunity to prepare for your reentry. Several things you need to do are build a RAFT, preserve memories, lower expectations and raise awareness.

Build a RAFT

Dave Pollock often suggested that people prepare for reentry by building a RAFT. This is an acronym for Reconciliations, Affirmations, Farewells, and Thoughts about your destination. Here are some suggestions for building your RAFT.

- Reconciliations. Even during a two week period disagreements may arise about issues, and the resulting tensions need to be resolved. List below people with whom you still have tensions resulting from differences in the way you view time, methods of construction, worship style, or any other issues.

Now actually go to and tell them you are sorry the conflict has occurred. Telling them you are sorry does not mean you are admitting wrong-doing, just that you wish the conflict had not occurred.

- Affirmations. On your trip people have helped you in various ways for which you are grateful. List below such people as those who led your team, been on your team, cooked for you, hosted you in their homes, interpreted for you, and done any other helpful things.

Now actually go and thank them in a culturally appropriate way. This may mean a handshake, a pat on the back, a hug, or a kiss.

- Farewells. You have become acquainted with new people on your trip. List below people you will be leaving behind and want to tell goodbye, such as children in your VBS class, those who sang with you, those who traveled with you to see things, and so forth.

Now actually go and tell them goodbye. This brings closure to your time with them and insures good relationships enduring in your absence. You may be surprised at who you meet again.

- Think destination. Of course, you have been thinking about going home since you arrived, but now is the time to make sure all is in order to get home. List below

things you need to check on, such as email or skype the person who is to meet you at the airport, make sure your passport is where you think it is, confirm your reservation with the airline, and so forth.

Passport available (you can't leave without it) _____

Preserve Memories

Although you may believe that you will never forget the experiences you have had during your short-term service, those memories will fade. However, if you have been keeping a journal or diary or notebook, you are more likely to remember the experiences. In addition, you may want to do the following two things to help preserve memories

- Real objects. This is the time to collect some objects that will help you remember the country and culture where you have been serving. Of course, you can buy things created as souvenirs – small ones, ones that mean something to you, not just things with the name of the country painted on them. However, do not overlook the common everyday things that have been part of life there, such as small toys children in your class play with, local musical instruments you have seen people play, a small flag of the country and so forth. List below some of the items you want to collect to take with you.

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- Digital media. In this digital age, you can carry thousands of pictures and hours of video on DVDs, CDs, and flash drives. Take pictures and video of people, places, and favorite things of all kinds. List below some of the items, persons, and places you want to include in your pictures or videos.
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Lower Expectations

Expectations are things you believe will happen in the future. If your expectations are appropriate, you are likely to have feelings of excitement, satisfaction, and accomplishment. However, if your expectations are too high, you may have feelings of disappointment, confusion, hurt, and frustration.

If you expect your friends and family to be as excited as you are about what you did, to keep their eyes glued to your pictures, and to hang on every word you have to say, your expectations are probably too high. If you expect them to ply you with questions and to increase their giving to people in other cultures, your expectations are probably too high. Bert Jones, CEO of GO InterNational says you will meet four kinds of people when you return:

- Those who did not even realize you were gone. They forgot you went anywhere.

- Those who thought you were on vacation. They knew you were gone, but remembered only that it was a trip.
- Those who are only casually interested. They knew you did some kind of short-term service but want only a two-minute summary of the highlights.
- Those who really want to hear about it. This is the smallest group, and you want to continue giving information only as long as they show interest.

Raise Awareness

For a few months after you return, it is good to occasionally examine yourself to see if you can detect any of the following traits appearing. These things tend to occur in people returning from service in another culture. If you periodically look at your attitudes, you can prevent them from becoming entrenched.

- Disappointment. Things that are exciting and important to you seem so “ho-hum” to your friends and family.
- Rejecting. You are distancing yourself from uninterested people and from your culture.
- Nostalgic. Most people want to be back with team members and nationals, but do not let that hurt your current relationships.
- Negative. You find a general negativity about everything in life developing in yourself.
- Alienated. Others begin distancing themselves from you because of your attitudes.
- Judgmental. Other people do not have the same view of things, so you begin to condemn them.
- Argumentative. If your value system has been changed because of your service, you may find yourself arguing about deeply held positions in your friends, positions you previously held.

- **Spiritually Superior.** You may find yourself believing that you are more spiritual than others who live like you used to live.

If you check yourself and ask trusted others to tell you when they see these traits appearing, you can avoid becoming something you would like to avoid.

Chapter 3

Good Memories

After you have had a new experience, it is often helpful to review what happened and see how that experience fits in with the overall story of your life. This naturally occurs when you report to people who have supported you in your short-term missionary service. Look back over pictures, video, and souvenirs to report what God did with the people you served and what God did with you. As you do this, you are well on your way to seeing how this experience fits in with the story of your life. Let's begin in this chapter by looking at some good memories.

Good Memories in Bible Times

Jonah

Jonah had very few good memories. As far as we know he had only two.

- He was thankful when God rescued him from the fish (Jonah 2:9).
- He was very happy about the vine that God made grow up to provide shade for him (Jonah 4:6).

Jesus' Apostles

We have no record of what was said at those debriefing times with the 12 apostles. However, the 72 that were sent out immediately after that returned with joy and noted that they even had power over the demons (Luke 10:17).

Paul

Paul and Barnabas must have told about their good memories 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 short-term service. No one will have done them all, but you will have probably done some of them.

Good Memories Today**My Story**

Bonnie wrote, "Each day as we worked and ate with the Brazilians we became one big family. We laughed at each other as we tried to communicate. Language can be a barrier, but God helped and we all learned from each other." Our fondest memories were of the people. We had come to love them and wanted to do more with and for them. What fun we had together.

We had come to help build the church, but it was not a little church. They were worshiping in a building that held about 75 people, but they were building a church for 500. The walls were up and the concrete second floor had been poured. We enjoyed actually seeing the second floor walls go up. What great memories we had of their spirited worship, and we imagined how 500 of them would sing in the new building.

We enjoyed trying new food. The coffee was stronger than we imagined coffee could be. Fruit was fresh off the tree

and tasted so much better than ours at home. We had never had papaya before, and I loved it. I still buy it when local stores have it, but it just does not taste the same as that ripened on the tree in Brazil.

We developed a lasting friendship with the other couple on the team. We still see them about once a year because they are now on the board of the agency with which we serve. We have good memories of friendships with Brazilian nationals as well, but those are just memories since we did not keep in contact with them. There was no email or skype then.

Not only was the church larger than we expected, so was Iguassu Falls. It was the name of a thriving city which was the place where of one of the largest hydroelectric dams in the world was under construction on the Parana River between Brazil and Paraguay. It was also the name of one of the largest and most beautiful waterfalls in the world! We had seen *The Mission*, a movie about early missionary work in the area, and we realized that the movie was actually filmed right there. What great memories.

Your Story

A few pages back you checked off the good things you did that were like those that Paul told the Ephesian church in Acts 20. Please take time to list below some of the other good things that happened during your short-term service.

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

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- What were some of the most deeply satisfying things that happened? Why were they so satisfying?

- What were your major accomplishments?

- What did you like most about other people on your team?

- What did you like most about the nationals you met?

- If family members were with you, what good things happened in your family?

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

- How do the above fit with the rest of your life story up to this point?

- How do you think God might use these good experiences as stepping stones into the next chapter of your story?

Chapter 4

Bad Memories

In addition to all the good memories in the last chapter there may be some bad memories about your short-term missionary service. You may want to forget about some, but events keep occurring to remind you of them. You may feel ashamed of other bad memories but keep reminding yourself about those. The best way to process them and really leave them behind is to recall them, think about them, and place them in the perspective of your whole life story.

Bad Memories in Bible Times

Jonah

Although Jonah had few good memories, he had many bad ones. Here are some of them.

- Caught in a violent storm that threatened to sink the ship (Jonah 1:4-6)
- Thrown overboard by sailors who were trying to save the ship (Jonah 1:7-16)
- Swallowed by a great fish where he remained for three days and nights (Jonah 1:17—2:10)

- Displeased that his compassionate God made his prophecy false (Jonah 3:10—4:2)
- So angry and discouraged that he wanted to die and repeatedly asked God to take his life (Jonah 4:3-9)

Jesus' Apostles

We do not know what the 12 reported that were bad memories, but we do know that Jesus warned them that some of the following things would occur

- Some would not welcome them or listen to them (Matthew 10:14).
- Others would hand them over to local councils (Matthew 10:17).
- Still others would flog them in the synagogue (Matthew 10:17).
- Finally, all people would hate them because of Jesus himself (Matthew 10:22).

Though we do not have records of that occurring during their short-term trip, we certainly do have a record of bad things that happened to Paul.

Paul

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 this conflict 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.” Paul wrote in more detail about these difficult times in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. These are listed below. Check off in the squares how many you have experienced yourself.

- Worked hard
- Been 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 and check in the circles of 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.

Bad Memories Today

My Story

It did not take long on the field for some events to occur that are really bad memories. The morning of our very first day, someone came running to me saying that Bonnie had been hit in the head by a brick. The way we got bricks up to the second floor where they were needed was to throw them up where another member of the team was waiting to catch them. The person above missed a thrown brick and it came down to strike a glancing blow on Bonnie’s head. It knocked her down,

required six stitches to close, and meant that she could not do heavy work. We realized that had the brick been four or five inches to one side, it could have killed her!

In addition to injury, there was illness. Though I was never ill, one young man on our team had intestinal problems and did not tell anyone. By the time we returned to the states he had lost 35 pounds and was so dehydrated that he was hospitalized.

One day while waiting to pay for some merchandise, Bonnie realized that a man had his hand in her purse trying to steal money. She yelled and jerked the purse away, then the man grabbed some of our merchandise and ran out of the store. The store manager ran out after him.

I felt uneasy in a place where I could not speak the language and could not ask anything or answer when asked something. I felt unsafe, not because something bad had happened, but because I knew I would not be able to cope if something did happen. Bargaining was new to me, and I did not like to do it, afraid I would be cheated or would take advantage of someone.

Missionaries often have travel problems, and our first trip was no exception. We boarded our plane for Brazil, but the plane had mechanical problems. Varig Airlines put us up for the night in a hotel, and flew another plane to Miami. We boarded that one in the morning, but we then sat on the tarmac for three hours while they made repairs on the new plane. Of course, that meant we had missed connections in Sao Paulo.

Your Story

A few pages back you checked off the bad things that were like those that Paul told the Ephesian church in 2

Corinthians 11. Please take time to list below some of the other bad memories during your short-term service.

- List the three worse memories you have of the short-term trip.

- What other ones do you have related to transportation?

- What other ones do you have related to health?

- What other ones do you have related to team members?

- What other ones do you have related to nationals?

- How did God use these bad experiences to bring growth in your life?

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

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

Chapter 5

Changes

Your short-term missionary service has probably changed you. Tennyson wrote in *Ulysses*, “I am a part of all that I have met.” Every experience we have changes us to some extent, but many people find that their first cross-cultural experience changes them greatly. Seeing the world through someone else’s eyes makes you realize that things are not always what they seemed to you.

Changes in Bible Times

Jonah

Like many people in short-term missionary service, Jonah was profoundly changed while serving—or was he? Let us look at him before, during, and after his short-term of service.

Before: Jonah did not want to go.

- He disobeyed and ran away from God (Jonah 1:1-4).
- He told the sailors on the ship that he was in open rebellion against God (Jonah 1:10).

During: After God pursued him, Jonah appeared to become a “model missionary.”

- He offered to sacrifice himself to save others (Jonah 1:12).
- He prayed to God for help (Jonah 2:1-2).
- He was thankful for God’s help (2:9).
- He obeyed God and revival came (Jonah 3:1-10).

From all observable factors he was a successful missionary. His ministry resulted in 120,000 people being saved during his short-term service. However, the changes in Jonah were only surface, and they did not last.

After: Jonah was unhappy and outraged at God.

- He was greatly displeased (Jonah 4:1).
- He became angry (Jonah 4:1).
- He chewed God out (Jonah 4:2).
- He asked God to kill him (Jonah 4:3).

Inside Jonah was still just like he was before he served. He essentially told God, “I knew this would happen before I left home—that’s why I ran the other way. I knew that you were a gracious, compassionate, loving God, and you would change your mind about destroying Nineveh!” No deep change in Jonah!

Paul

We previously read in Acts 14 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. Second, they reported how God had saved those of other cultures.

After Paul and Barnabas had been in Antioch a long time at the end of their first term, some people from Judea came down to Antioch and said that people of other cultures could not be saved unless they were circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses. When the local church in Antioch could not settle the matter, they sent Paul and Barnabas up to headquarters in Jerusalem to try to get it settled. After much debate, the administrators at headquarters “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. They knew that God saved people who did not follow the customs of Moses. However some people (the Judiazers) back near headquarters had not changed.

Changes Today

My Story

Though I had prayed for missionaries and given to missions most of my life, I had never had a passion to be personally involved in missions. My involvement had been doing what I thought a Christian should do, not something I needed to be involved in myself. Now I was excited about missions and thought others should be as well. I could not understand why others seemed so apathetic.

I did not realize I had been the same as the others before I went until one member of our Bible study group said, “Ron, you have really changed. We are still the same.”

Another member of the group said, “Don’t worry. It’ll wear off. Mine did.”

A colleague of mine at the College said, “You’re just going through a mid-life crisis.”

Mission work was no longer something others did. It now was something I felt compelled to be an integral part of myself. I did not know exactly what I was to do, but I was called to do something. I was confused and searching for specifics but had not yet found any of them. All I knew was that I could not go back to being what I was before.

Your Story

During the weeks or months you were gone on your short-term missionary service, you, your friends, your family have all changed to some extent. However, you have probably changed much more than those who remained at home, especially if this is your first cross-cultural experience. Those who remained at home were not exposed to the same new ways of thinking and acting, so they have probably changed only slightly.

It is important not only for you to know that you have changed but also for you to know how you have changed. Like Jonah, some people return from their short-term service disgusted and sorry that they ever went, and they never want to return again. Like Paul, other people return excited about their time of service and take up the cause of world missions. What are some of the ways you may have changed?

- How has your view of the nationals you served changed (Are they more lazy and irresponsible than you thought, or are they more resilient and doing the best they can under the circumstances)?

- How has your view of missionaries changed (Are they doing more than you thought for people while living in a difficult culture, or do they live in larger houses and drive more expensive vehicles)

- How has your view of missions changed (Is it more of a waste of time and money than you thought, or is it so important that you want to increase what you give and get personally involved)?

- How has your view of your own church changed (Is it more complacent than you thought before, or is it more involved in missions than you thought)?

- How has your view of yourself changed (Do you see your faith as unchanged, stronger than before you went, or weaker than before)?

- How have you changed emotionally (Was what you saw so disgusting that you do not even want to think about it, or did what you see break your heart so much that you have a new sense of compassion)?

- How have you changed theologically (Do you now understand why Jesus was deeply moved and wept, or do you not see how a loving God could let people live like that)?

- How has your world-view changed (Do you wonder how people can be so dumb to think the way they do, or do you now see that there are many ways to look at things differently)?

- How has your view of your own culture changed (Are people more materialistic and superficial than you thought, or do you see that your country does more to help than you thought)?

- How has your view of the culture where you served changed (Were you shocked how people lie to avoid offending others, or did you see people there so considerate and kind to each other that they never said anything hurtful)?

- In what other ways have you changed?

- Which of the above changes do you think are permanent and will last the rest of your life? Which do you think are temporary and will wear off?
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Chapter 6

What Next?

As you have looked back over good and bad memories as well as changes, you may have had some thoughts about what comes next. This is a good time to consider what might happen next in your life. You may even want to propose some possible next steps to yourself—or even to others.

What Next in Bible Times?

Jonah

We do not know what happened next in Jonah's life. In the New Testament Jesus mentioned that he would be in the earth for the same amount of time as Jonah was in the fish. Then he went on to note that Jonah's preaching resulted in the repentance of the people of Nineveh; however Jesus does not add anything happening with Jonah at a later time (Matthew 12:39-41, Matthew 16:4, Luke 11:29-30).

Paul

After settling a theological dispute that arose during their time back home, Paul proposed a next step to Barnabas. Paul said, “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” (Acts 15:36). Look at Paul’s proposal.

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

Barnabas apparently agreed that it was a good idea and added that he “wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them.” However, Paul did not think that was a good idea.

- Where did Paul finally go? (Acts 16:10) _____
- Who went with Paul? (Acts 15:40) _____
- What did Paul do? (Acts 16:11-18:22) _____
- Where did Barnabas finally go? (Acts 15:39) _____
- Who went with Barnabas? (Acts 15:39) _____

A proposal is just suggesting some possible options without committing to any of them. It is good to suggest a number of possibilities, and then come back later to make final decisions about them after much prayer and seeking God’s will.

Paul was a highly educated man climbing the prestige ladder of Judaism when God called him. Some people think of Paul as immediately becoming a missionary after God spoke to him. However, that is not the case as Paul himself wrote in

Galatians 1. Before beginning his well-known missionary career, Paul spent three years learning from God in Arabia, then time with Peter and James—and it was 14 years later at the end of his first term of missionary service when he again went up to Jerusalem. He spent more than a decade learning and serving before the church at Antioch commissioned him for missionary service.

What Next Today?

My Story

Some changes took place immediately after my first short-term service. A few weeks after returning, I wrote, “In the three weeks since we returned, we have presented the work in Brazil to two groups at church, taken shares in two more missionaries, and started writing about missions.”

During the next few years Bonnie and I approached several mission agencies to see if they had a place where we could serve. When Bonnie said she was a certified elementary teacher, every one of them had a place for her. When I told them I had taught psychology for a quarter of a century, they all said that they could use counselors. However, when I told them that my PhD was in experimental psychology (rather than counseling psychology), they had nothing for me.

During that same time we made several more short-term mission trips to Spain where I gave a series of lectures on adolescence, to Bolivia where I helped raise funds to build a university, and a couple times to Jamaica where we helped conduct Bible schools. However, none of these fit me. I am not a good lecturer, I am not a fund raiser, and I do not work well with children.

Since all the agencies we approached said they could use counselors, in 1992 at the age of 50 I enrolled in a graduate program to respecialize in counseling psychology. I spent the next four years teaching at the undergraduate level full-time and taking graduate level courses half-time to learn what I needed to learn to provide member care for missionaries. At age 55 we made our first member care visit in 1997, and I quit teaching in 2002 (age 60) to devote full-time to member care.

God never blinded me with a bright light and did not give me specific instructions (as he did with Paul in Acts 9), but he did guide me step-by-step over the next 13 years as I prepared to serve in member care of missionaries.

Your Story

You are now at the point of writing more of your story. What you write depends on you and God. In general, your story can take three courses. First, you can continue your story in the direction it was going before you made your short-term missionary service. Second, you may change your story in a minor way to include more of the same types of things you were doing before you went. Third, you may change your story dramatically, taking it in a very different direction.

First, if you are going to continue with no changes, that needs no further consideration

Second, if you change your story to include more similar things you have been doing, what might you add? List some possibilities below.

- Praying. List ways you might add praying for missionaries. (Pray for missions a specified time each day. Start a missionary prayer meeting with others. Contact mission agencies for prayer requests. Etc.).

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- Giving. List ways to increase your mission donations (giving a specified amount monthly, increasing the percentage of your offerings for missions, holding fund raisers for missions, etc.).
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- Serving. List ways of serving in the church (serving on the missions committee, volunteering to help with missionary mailings, writing monthly to missionaries your church supports, etc.)
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- List other ways God may have brought to mind.
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Third, if you change your story dramatically to include missions, what might you do? List some possibilities below.

- What mission agencies might you contact to see how you might fill needs they have?
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- What new training might you get to prepare you to fill a need in missions?
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- What kinds of additional short-term service could you offer on a continuing basis?
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- What ways of serving has God laid on your heart?
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A Final Comment

People often ask how can they know what God wants them to do? How can they know where God wants them to serve? Some people seem to be looking for some dramatic event in which God specifically tells them where God wants them to go or what he wants them to do.

Sometimes God does call people through dramatic events, such as when Paul had the vision of the man from Macedonia begging him to come over into Macedonia to help those who lived there. Paul and those serving with him immediately prepared to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called them to preach the gospel there (Acts 16:9-10).

At other times, God calls through much less dramatic means, such as in Acts chapter 15, the chapter before the dramatic Macedonian call. After the people at headquarters in Jerusalem had settled the theological dispute, they wanted to let the churches know their decision. Then it “seemed good” to the apostles, the elders and the whole church to send Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas to take their letter to Antioch (Acts 15:22). Thus these four men received their call as to what to do and where to go through what “seemed good” to the leaders in Jerusalem.

In their letter, the leaders wrote that since they were in agreement, it “seemed good” for them to send the men with the letter to explain it. They went on to say that it “seemed good” to the Holy Spirit as well as to them to not overburden them with too many rules (Acts 15:25-28). In these cases, people received their calls to service through what “seemed good” to

others. (Note: Although several recent paraphrases use different words in verses 22, 25, and 28, the same Greek word is used in all three, and the most common translation of it is “seemed good.”)

Be careful not to be so concerned about a dramatic call that you miss what God is saying to you in much more usual ways.

Recommended Readings

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)

Marion Knell. (2006). *Burn-Up or Splash Down: Surviving the Culture Shock of Re-Entry*. Authentic, PO Box 444, 285 Lynwood Ave, Tyrone, GA 30290. (Written by a Family Cross-Cultural Consultant preparing people for international assignments and debriefing them when they return.)

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)

Pirola, 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)

Pirola, 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)

The following E-books are available on www.missionarycare.com free of charge.

Koteskey, R. L., & Koteskey, B. R. (posted November 2003). *Coming “home”: The reentry transition*. www.missionarycare.com. (This book is written to be used by people after they reach their passport country.)

Koteskey, R. L., & Koteskey B. R. (posted February 2007). *We’re going home: Reentry for elementary children*. www.missionarycare.com. (This book is written for children 6-12 years of age.)

Koteskey R. L. (posted February 2007). *I don’t want to go homes: Parent’s guide for reentry for elementary children*. www.missionarycare.com. (This book is for the parents of children 6-12 years of age.)