

FIRST • TERM

Survival Guide

*Transitioning
to your new
culture, location,
and people group takes
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Transitioning to your new culture, location, and people group takes time and perseverance.

Successful transition requires spiritual, mental, and physical preparation.

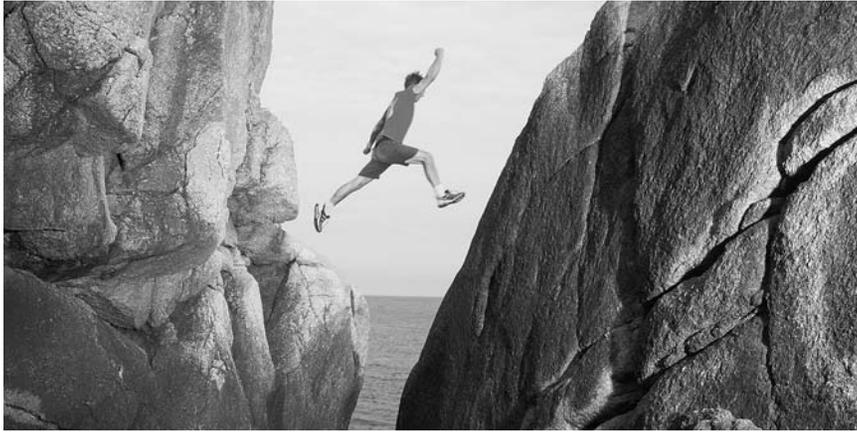
This booklet from the Missionary Care Division is provided with the prayer that you will embrace the major life changes before you in the strength and power of your all-sufficient God who is...

“able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.”

2 Corinthians 9:8

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil; to give you a future and a hope.”

Jeremiah 29:11



First Term Survival Guide

The term *culture shock* is familiar to you. You may have visited your field or served short term and assume it will not affect you very much, but it will. Accept the transition stress and keep moving through the process. *By God's grace you will survive, eventually thrive, and enjoy your new culture and its precious people.*

Many excellent books have been written about transition stress and cross-cultural adjustment. You have read at least one. Other recommendations are in the appendix.

This summary is presented for your personal preparation.

The Adjustment Process

Accept the reality that adjusting to your new culture is a process measured in *years, not months*.

You are unique. The speed of your adjustment is unpredictable. Therefore, do not measure yourself by your preconceived expectations or those of others.

No one can bypass any step in the process. Everyone moves through it *on* their own and *at* their own pace.

Most people discover that it is a four-year process.

Do what is necessary to maintain your time with God. It will be your life-line for stability, perspective, hope, and endurance. You have always needed it. You need it now more than ever. Until you get the language, your spiritual nourishment depends on your ability to feed yourself from the Word. The devotional, *Walk as He Walked*, is provided by the Missionary Care Division (MCD). Please use it. If you are married, discuss it as a family. If you are single, find a spiritual mentor to discuss it with.

Transition Stages

Transition stages are real but not easily differentiated. The reactions are common, but each individual will have a unique learning style and experience

Excitement - *Everything is different and interesting.*

Disorientation - *Everything is different and frustrating.*

After the initial excitement wears off, disorientation sets in. Smells, sounds, language, food, money, living quarters, people, coworkers...all the changes wear on your mind and emotions, leading to fear, impatience, frustration, or depression. You left your independent, competent life and have moved into a life of *temporary incompetence*.

Orientation (the longest stage) - *Comparing normals*

You are getting used to your new location and situation. You recognize and use more and more of the language. You are beginning to feel safe. You are moving beyond shock to comparing the differences without wishing more than once a day that you could quit or wondering if you totally misinterpreted God's calling for your life.

Appreciation - *Understanding and accepting both normals.*

You have moved beyond *this is interesting...* to *this is dumb...* to the *oh, this is why...* stage of understanding your culture. There are always reasons people live the way they do. You are discovering, accepting, and beginning to appreciate them.

Enculturation - *Embracing the new normal*

You no longer think much about the host culture. It has become your new normal. Nationals forget you are a foreigner and confide in you about *the North Americans*.

Disorientation - *Furlough reentry to North America*

Oh, boy...here we go again! Everything has changed, including home, family, and even ourselves.



First Term Realities

It will be harder than you think. It is a four year process.
Every weakness will be exposed and expanded. 1 Tim 4:16
Satan attacks where you think you are strong.
You will consider quitting (many times). 1 Cor 9:16 John 6:66-68
Fears and disappointments will come. 2 Cor 7:5
Everyone struggles with change (everyone).
Idealistic, rigid, and controlling people struggle greatly.
Critical people and hero-worshippers struggle greatly.
Most will survive and eventually thrive in their new culture.

Field Prep Panel Advice*

Do not neglect the spiritual disciplines. Luke 10:42
Keep your sense of humor. Stay close to God and do not quit.
Stay positive; your kids will reflect your attitude.
Do not withdraw and hide; reach out. Your team does care.
Communicate. Be honest. Think truth.
You are not alone; everyone goes through transition stress.
Refusing to admit stress will only bind you to it.
You will always be a foreigner.. accept that fact.
Don't make excuses; make choices (good ones). 1 Sam 15:21-22
Remember: ministry is a journey, not a destination. John 21:22
First days are important; do not neglect your kids during setup.
Keep your expectations low and your love for others high.
Work at loving and connecting with your team.
Get involved with nationals immediately.
Loneliness is an absence of relationships, not people.
Learn the language well; it is a great time to meet new people.
Fall in love with the people. Love your next-door neighbors.
Smile: people will love you; Cry: people will help you.
Discard your expectations; it probably won't be what you expect.
Different is not worse, it is just, well, *different*.
Change is good. Embrace it. It will help you mature.
Always maintain the attitude of a learner.
Ask; do not assume. Assumptions are mostly wrong.
Listen to veterans - they survived; to nationals - they live here.
God is working in *you*, not just in *your ministry*.
English TV and internet become crutches; watch local TV, if any.
Disconnecting from the old life allows connecting to the new.

*Panel consisted of Regional Administrators and long term veterans

Learning to live a life beyond your control

Living in a world that is out of control brings feelings of helplessness, insecurity, irritation, and fear. You are unable to function on your own at first. For now, you are just surviving. **You have changed**

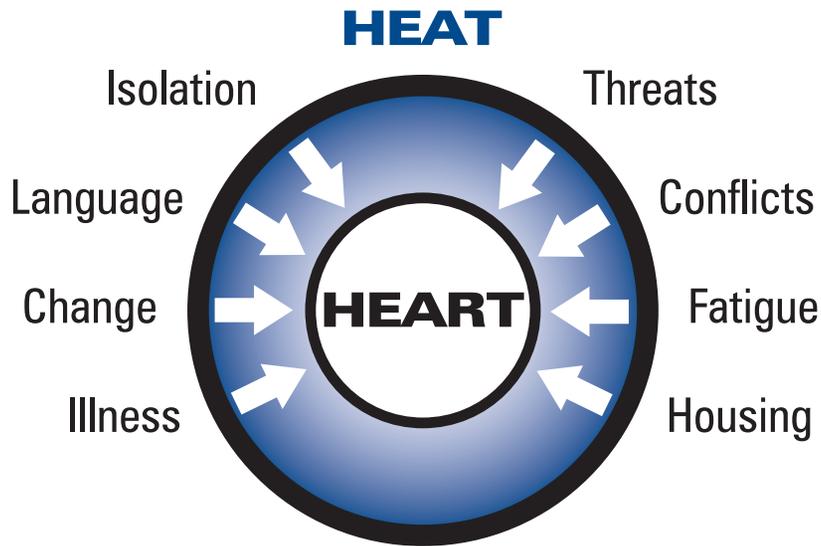
from	to
strong	weak
powerful	dependent
successful	surviving
significant	unimportant
competent	incompetent
confident	embarrassed
respected	resented or ignored
influential	irrelevant
problem solver	being a problem
surrounded (caring people)	alone
appreciated	ignored
mobile	stuck
familiar	fearful
predictable life and location	uncertain
precious possessions	meaningless stuff

Transition is tough, even if you have visited the field, know coworkers, or live in an English-based country. Just moving from one region of North America to another is stressful. Even the US and Canada have significant cultural differences. Adjusting takes time. Give yourself time. You cannot rush the process.

Your personal weaknesses will surface during the stress. If you struggled with anger in the past, you will probably struggle again. If you struggled with a bitter spirit, lust, discontent, complaining, comparing, or any other sinful manifestation of the old nature, you can expect the temptations to rise up strongly again. The *heat* reveals the *heart*. God is using the *heat* to change your *heart*. Trust Him.

HEAT ISSUES are external.

We may or may not be able to cool them off.



HEART ISSUES are internal.

We are responsible for our heart attitudes, perspectives and responses to the *heat* we are feeling.



God says that *heart issues* are the real issues of life.

Ps 139:23, Jer 17:10, Pro 4:23, Matt 12:33-37, Matt 15:18-19, 2 Tim 2:22

Cross cultural ministry is cross-carrying ministry.

Following Christ includes becoming a stranger, a sojourner, a pilgrim and a servant. "Hear my prayer, O Lord...for *I am a stranger with You*" Psalm 39:12 (italics added for emphasis)

Consider the following:

What did Jesus experience in coming to earth?

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------|
| Leaving home | Incarnation |
| Learning to talk | Growing up |
| Satanic attack | Wilderness |
| Coworker conflict | Last supper |
| Coworker attrition | Judas |
| Inner conflict, loneliness | Gethsemane |
| Injustice, rejection | Trials |
| Agony, suffering | Cross |

What did Paul experience in crossing cultures?

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| First term attrition | Acts 13:13 |
| Language barrier | Acts 14:11-14 |
| Co-worker conflict | Acts 15:39 |
| Stress, confusion | 2 Cor 4:8 |
| Trouble, conflict, fear | 2 Cor 7:5 |
| Tragedy, exhaustion, insomnia | 2 Cor 11:23-27 |
| Satanic attack | 2 Cor 12:7-10 |
| Loneliness, heartache | 2 Tim 4:9-10 |

What will you experience in your transition? Our research from the last decade reveals the very same things.

The following summary is not intended to distress you.

It is provided to prepare you for the reality of the negatives involved in the adjustment process. We are confident you can make the transition successfully by God's grace and an honest, humble, close walk with Christ.

Top Ten Contributing Factors in Early Attrition

1. Loneliness
2. Fear and uncertainty (safety, personal failure)
3. Team conflict, loss, change
4. Loss of significance, routine, and fit
5. Family conflict
6. Unfulfilled expectations
7. Powerlessness and dependency
8. Cultural differences (slowness to get anything done)
9. Health stress (fatigue, headaches, depression)
10. Language acquisition stress

Top 10 Contributing Factors in Staying

1. Clear call from God
2. Supportive spouse and family
3. Healthy spiritual life and spiritual disciplines
4. Adaptability to new culture and language (flexibility)
5. Good relationships with colleagues
6. Regular supervision and pastoral type care
7. Dependable financial support
8. Ability to cope with stress and workload
9. Contact with friends, church and prayer team at home
10. Good relationships with field leadership and agency

Common reactions to the first four year term

- | | |
|--------|---|
| Year 1 | "I'll never make it here for four years." |
| Year 2 | "I'll stay the four years but I'm not coming back." |
| Year 3 | "I'll wait for furlough and then decide." |
| Year 4 | "I could never live in North America again." |



Top Ten Contributing Factors in Early Attrition

or

"And my next reason for quitting today is..."

The list that follows was compiled from interviews with first-term missionaries by the Missionary Care Division of ABWE over the last decade. This information is *provided not to create fear, but to help you face the reality of the second stage of cultural adjustment called **Disorientation***. Good information can motivate good preparation. Forewarned is forearmed.

You will experience some factors more than others. Some will be more relevant to you depending on your background, age, experience, destination, aptitude, and personality.

God will be teaching you a great deal, mostly about *yourself* and *Himself*. You may learn a new level of dependency and a new awareness of God's sufficiency as He reveals your weaknesses in the process of making you strong in Him alone.

Seek to separate the *heat* issues from the *heart* issues. While you must give attention to both, major on your heart, for "out of it are the issues of life."

Proverbs 4:23

1 Loneliness - the cost of cross cultural ministry

You are uprooted from family, church, and close friends. Life has become a series of goodbyes. Missionary life is filled with transitions. You make friendships that end and are saddened at the loss. Seeing nationals with close family accentuates feelings of being left out. Being a foreigner means being different. It often means being treated rudely and taken advantage of. Loneliness is a major contributing cause of depression. People accustomed to a large support network of friends and family may struggle with loneliness more acutely than others.

Advice from the Veterans

Embrace change and know life will eventually get better. Work on building relationships with nationals from the outset. Do not view nationals simply as *objects of ministry*. Building friendships takes time. Not every friend will be a lasting friend, but some will become very special, lifelong friends.

Develop a ministry mindset toward your team. Recognize that you are there to minister to your whole team. You need to be involved with one another in addition to ministry tasks. Learn to work and play together regularly. Couples should include singles (and vice versa) for holidays, special events, or any occasion. Teamwork is the key. Practice mutual respect.

Never, ever lose your sense of humor. Stay humble and teachable, letting God grow you in the process. Keep your heart close to the Lord.

Skype, Vonage, etc. allow frequent contact with home. While this is a blessing, be aware that this can become an escape, hindering you from connecting with your new culture and making the new friendships you need.

Maintaining an *additional* accountability relationship with someone back home can provide long-term accountability regardless of furloughs, changing locations, ministries, and team members.

Devotional Bible Study Suggestions

- Lives of Joseph, Moses, Ruth, Elijah, Daniel
- Book of Exodus (Moses)
- Book of I Peter (Life as a pilgrim)

(The back of this booklet includes a sample Bible study guide)

2 Fear and uncertainty

Fear of failure is common. You may start to think, “I’ve made a big mistake.” Doubting the genuineness of God’s call is not unusual. You may have told a hundred churches, “God called me...,” but that sense of sureness may vanish. The *what if panic* sets in: *what if I fail the language test, get robbed, sick, lost, do not lead anyone to Christ, cannot cut it, or lose support?*

Fear of failure also includes unmet expectations and the pressure to perform. Just staying in-country can be a challenge. You never know when you may have to hurriedly leave. Churches may experience conflict leading to loss of your support. Churches may make music styles, Bible versions, or other issues a test of fellowship, sending a questionnaire to determine if they will continue your support.

Fear is real. Fear feeds on fear, leading to fears for family, children, and family back home. Your response to illness may be extreme fear.

When one spouse doesn’t share the desire to quit and assumes that showing sympathy will only make it worse, you or your spouse may develop anger and bitterness.

Advice from the Veterans

Unexpressed fears do not go away. People cannot read your mind. Be honest with yourself, God, and your leadership about what you are experiencing. Outside perspectives from godly mentors can help. Have frequent times of discussion and prayer with your spouse, children and an accountability partner. Talk and pray with your children about any fears they may be having.

Daily devotions are an opportune time to pray specifically about your fears. Face your fears with God’s Word. Memorize “fear not” verses. It doesn’t all depend on you. God will accomplish His purposes in you in His own time. Take your eyes off yourself and seek to meet others’ needs. Enlist intercessory prayer from trusted prayer partners. Make a CD or DVD of your commissioning service and replay it often.

Devotional Bible Study Suggestions

- Life of Abraham, Esther
- Book of 2 Corinthians
- Psalms 18, 27, 42, 43, 46, 62, 130, 131

3 Team conflict, loss, and change

Healthy interpersonal relationships require adjusting to preferences, personalities, expectations, and energy levels. Carnality is not just a North American problem. We can all be guilty of judgmental attitudes, unexpressed conflict, and harboring hurts from the past. Everybody has an opinion (or two). Some colleagues may have very different views of women's ministry roles. Committee meetings may seem unproductive, and you will be tempted to avoid them. Spending so much time doing unproductive things (like surviving!) can lead to impatience and intolerance toward others. Feeling that you are not needed or appreciated by your team may lead to avoiding the team and spending more time with missionaries of other agencies. This can lead to even greater dysfunction within your team. Another temptation is assuming nationals are more spiritual than fellow missionaries. Part of this is a transition response of *rejecting home culture and accepting only host culture*. Nationals may say things like, "You are the only ones that really care about us... the only ones who work hard... the only ones who really love us... you are different from all the other missionaries... you speak the language best." Beware of listening to these things. It leads to spiritual arrogance and a bitter, critical spirit toward your colleagues.

Advice from the Veterans

Remember, your team is not perfect and neither are you. Keep your eyes on Christ. Keep your love for others high and your expectations low. Love as He loved us (John 13:34-35). Forgive as you are forgiven (Eph 4:31-32). Pray for all your colleagues daily. Be an instrument of grace, peace and appreciation. Avoid the temptation of judging your brothers and sisters (James 4). Remember that life is a battleground, not a playground. Maintain the armor of God daily (Eph 6). Keep truth and mercy tied around your neck (Proverbs 3).

Be quick to take the initiative to settle relationship problems, obeying Eph 4:26, Matt 18:15-17, and James 5:16. Remember, there is more than one way to accomplish the same objective. Function is essential; forms are optional. Be generous in seeking to understand another's point of view. Matt 5-7 is a wonderful sermon of Christ to meditate, memorize, and implement. It is our love for each other that gives credence to our message. Holiness, humility, and harmony are the three things Jesus prayed for His church in John 17. Pray John 17 for yourself and your team often.

Devotional Bible Study Suggestions

- Life of Barnabas, Jonathan, Moses
- Book of Joshua
- Matthew 5-7
- John 17

4 Loss of significance, routine, and fit

One of the major stress factors of cultural transition is loss of significance, routine, and fit. Life has become a series of moving to new places, houses, and ministries. The changes seem endless. Sometimes you just wonder, *Why can't something stay put for a while?* The desire to be settled and get into a routine is not wrong, but it may take a long time to get there. We came from an active life of spiritual doing. Now we are faced with the question, *Since I can't do much, what good am I?* It is a form of identity crisis. It is frustrating not being able to do the things you did before. You used to teach the Bible, understand people, be able to interpret looks, actions, and questions, and get into deep conversations. You have gone from universal respect to silent stares or sympathy. Feelings of discontent and ingratitude may mount. Life is slow. It takes so long to get anything done, and the red tape is constant. You did not plan to go through all these years of preparation and effort just to exist. The road to competence seems endless. The good news is, it's not! Little by little you will grow out of this temporary loss of significance into vital ministry once more.

Advice from the Veterans

Work at building and strengthening relationships with team members, neighbors, and nationals. Spend time and effort to learn as much about others as you can. Team up with your colleagues regularly for prayer, spiritual refreshment, and recreation. Do not let the things you cannot do keep you from doing what you can do. Be a blessing. Be an encourager. Develop an attitude of gratitude, giving thanks verbally and often in everything (1 Thess 5:18). *Existing* is not your ultimate goal, but it is a first step! Do not underestimate what God can do through you in the first term. How you respond to irritations and change is more important than getting things done. The *heat* of insignificance is an opportunity to develop a *heart* of humility, contentment, and perseverance. Significance is ultimately found in our relationship to Christ. He is our source of unchanging stability. His love for us is not dependent on our performance. Abide in Him and rest on His sovereign, all-sufficient grace.

Devotional Bible Study Suggestions

- Lives of Joseph, David, Daniel
- Book of Exodus (Moses)
- Book of Philippians (Paul's perspective in prison)
- Psalms 18, 46, 61, 62, 130, 131

5 Family conflict

The never-ending nature of ministry, people intruding, requests for help, endless needs, lack of privacy, and stress all lead to anger and frustration. The stress can cause Mom and Dad to be upset with each other. Angry parents produce confused and fearful children. Common reactions in stressed children include separation anxiety, clinging, crying, withdrawing into silence, and recurring nightmares. Stress often leads to an absence of physical intimacy in marriage. Lack of physical intimacy increases sexual frustration and vulnerability to temptation. Rampant sexual images prevalent in many cultures add to the temptation to escape stress through sexual sin.

Advice from the Veterans

Do not wait. Get help when you first need it. Be honest and talk about what you are going through with safe friends. Get a mentor who has been there and survived. Recognize you are not alone in the struggle. Take definite steps to strengthen your marriage and build godly relationships. Find someone you can trust to watch the kids, allowing you to go on a date. (Be sure to take the advice of older, trusted colleagues before allowing anyone to be alone with your children. Never, ever leave your children with people who are not fully known and worthy of that trust).

Recognize that transition stress makes you more vulnerable. Guard your eyes and your heart. Memorize scripture. Install filters and *Covenant Eyes Software* on your computer. Find an accountability partner who really holds you accountable. Ask the tough questions often. Be cautious and wise in the use of media.

People do family differently from culture to culture. Demonstrating love and honor for one another in this new culture must be learned. Seek to discern what is a North American cultural form and what is an authentic, biblical necessity. Be gracious and flexible in the learning process

Devotional Bible Study Suggestions

- Lives of Joseph, Samuel, Ruth
- Study the “one another’s” of scripture; memorize your favorites.
- Book of Ephesians
- Book of Proverbs (especially chapters 5,6,7,9,18,24,25)

6 Expectations - every saint on earth is a sinner still

Some of us struggle with perfectionism. We have an expectation that everything *ought* to be done right. The *ideal* becomes the enemy of the *real* and the *ought* to consume us. We think, “*But missionaries ought to know better, be better, and do better.*” It is easy to yield to the temptation to give vent to a critical spirit or compare yourself with others. You came to the field expecting to use your gifts in some particular place or ministry. However, personnel, plans, and priorities can change all of that. You may find yourself serving where you are *needed* instead of where you really feel *called or gifted* to serve. You may feel you are ready for more responsibility but not yet trusted or valued by the team. You may feel coworkers let you down when you need them, or that they should know when you are hurt or hurting.

You can be misinterpreted by nationals who think your friendliness is romantic or your independence is arrogance. There is always so much to do with so many demands on time and resources. It is easy to start feeling used when nationals seem to be your friends only for what they can get from you. Beware of cynicism; it strangles compassion.

We must learn to love one another even in the face of the reality that we are all people in process who have not yet arrived

Advice from the Veterans

Jesus knew what was in man (John 2:23-25), but He never became cynical. He remained totally committed to His team in spite of knowing all their weaknesses and future failures (John 13:1). He is our pattern and provides the power to love all men. Commit yourself to do what is needed, trusting God to grow you in the process. Trust Him to open the right doors at the right time to fulfill your ministry desires. Get sufficient rest and exercise. It is tough to keep a positive perspective when you are just worn out. (Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is take a nap!) Seek to keep your life in balance with the truly essential things in place. Keep in mind why you came to this new culture; it will help you make wise decisions and maintain structure in your life. You did not come to this new culture to abandon your children or to worship them. Keep your home Christ-centered and joyful.

Devotional Bible Study Suggestions

- Lives of Timothy, Twelve Disciples
- Book of James
- Gospel of Luke
- John MacArthur’s *Twelve Ordinary Men; Twelve Extraordinary Women*

7 Powerlessness and dependency

One major facet of transition stress is moving from competency and independence into a stage of temporary incompetence and dependence. You traveled all over the country during prefield, functioning effortlessly and totally at home in language and law, culture and custom, shopping, research, home, business, education, and media. Now, you cannot even answer the phone by yourself. Every past weakness will be exposed and exploited by stress and Satan's attacks. This sense of weakness and helplessness causes most of us at some point to feel that coming to the field was a complete waste of time. (All the time, all the money, all the effort, all the education, and you feel like the most limited national can *do ministry* ten times better than you ever will). The *if only's* can capture the mind. *If only* I were healthy, were a better student, had a good friend, a better team, were in a different country, were back home, or had more money. Powerlessness can lead to spiritual discouragement and just *going through the motions* in your spiritual life. You are too busy or too tired to pray. You may feel empty inside. Your prayers may seem hollow. Some try to *fake it* spiritually. Others respond by going into isolation, escaping into computer, TV, or Vonage. Feeling helpless often leads to anger, and jealousy, and feeling you are not valued by the team. They may not understand your need for help. You wonder if they think you lack commitment when they say things like, "If you come back next term..." On the other hand, if you reach competency quickly, you can easily be overwhelmed by demands you feel unprepared to handle.

Advice from the Veterans

The props are gone, and the reality of your own weakness is a gift from God to drive you to a deeper walk with Him. Effective servants of Christ consider themselves useless without the power of the Spirit. It is through utter dependence on God that we experience His power in these vessels of clay. Keep your *listening time* with God a priority. Set aside special times for private prayer. Maintain daily personal and family devotional times and team worship. You must labor at getting your focus off of yourself and on Christ and His word. In all the changes, He alone is unchanging. Schedule your time wisely and realistically. Pace yourself. Remember, God made you as you are for His purpose and glory. Ministry is about relationships, so build them.

Devotional Bible Study Suggestions

- Lives of Joseph, Daniel, Ruth
- Book of Galatians
- Gospel of Mark
- Psalm 18, 46, 130, 131

8 Cultural differences

Letting go of the old and embracing the new requires time, flexibility, and patience. While you may not lust for the "leeks and garlics of Egypt," covetousness and discontent is a problem for all of us. The good old days of Wal-Mart and Home Depot may be gone. The lying, begging, requests for help, rudeness, deceitfulness, inability to trust, manipulation, crowded and dangerous public transportation - it all takes a toll on the mind. This new life is permanently different. Living standards may have changed drastically for you. You were middle class but now you are sensing guilt and anger with yourself for having so much compared to others. Some may have to manage on a fixed income substantially lower than they were used to. Food has changed. Some love the food and some hate it. New eating habits, tastes, and recipes are additional learning curves to conquer. Your new culture has twenty-four hours in a day, but they view it differently. You may feel controlled by everybody else's plans or desires. National leaders may resent your resources. They may be threatened by or reject your knowledge and experience. It may be hard to admit not even *liking* the nationals you thought you *loved*. Give yourself time to work through it. This will not be permanent. Love is a decision. Your feelings will eventually catch up to your decisions to love as Christ loves.

Advice from the Veterans

Christ went cross-cultural too (1 Pet 2:21). Transition stress is real. In acceptance there is peace. Accept the time and the process. There is just no substitute for time. Choose to frequently point out the positive. Encourage the family to enjoy the *perks* of your new life and location. Embrace the journey and open your eyes to the adventure before you. Do the same when you return on furlough. Help your kids realize the host culture is *different, not wrong*. Your attitude and outlook will usually be mirrored by your children. Befriend mature, godly, national believers. Seek wisdom to determine when you need to set a new standard (moral issues) and when you need to adjust to the culture (amoral issues like perspectives on time and decision making). Your *new field* must become your *new world*. Find ways to connect meaningfully to your new culture and neighbors including food, holidays, sports, special locations, and common interests. Seek to become an expert on your new country and culture.

Devotional Bible Study Suggestions

- Lives of Joseph, Moses, Ruth, Esther, Daniel
- Book of Proverbs
- Book of Hebrews

9 Health and transition stress

Transition stress frequently affects physical health. Common symptoms of prolonged stress include fatigue, increasing tiredness unabated by sleep, exhaustion, insomnia, or sleeping *all* the time. Sleep is often an escape to avoid dealing with the stress. Other symptoms include loss of appetite, listlessness, depression (cyclical during winter or rainy seasons), memory problems, and headaches.

Possible Signs of Acute Stress Overload include

extreme or constant irritation and anxiety, chronic depression, unresolved and increasing anger over minor things, inexplicable guilt, sadness, grief, fear, jealousy, despair, and inner deadness. Some experience crazy, scary thoughts and feel like they're losing it.

It is common to give in to self-pity with thoughts like, *after all I gave up coming here, why does God allow this?* Having sick children, chronic illness, and inferior standards of medical care can trigger acute fears.

Advice from the Veterans

Do not deny or hide what you are experiencing. Get it on the table and get help now. Talk to those who care and can do something about it.

Depression may be a spiritual issue of believing lies leading to self defeat.

Do not forsake the spiritual disciplines of the Word and prayer.

Depression may be a physical issue. Exhaustion, illness, fatigue, and lack of exercise all contribute to being down. Change your habits. Schedule time for regular relaxation and recreation. Look at what's needed for a long-term, sustainable ministry lifestyle.

Depression may be a social issue. It is often triggered by an absence of constructive relationships. Lack of conversation, relaxation, interaction, and acceptance takes a toll on all of us. We all need social interaction to remain healthy. Isolation is unhealthy for body or mind. Relationship building is vital.

Depression may be a medical issue. Do not rule out a medical cause, especially if it runs in your family. Get a complete physical with follow-up care.

Devotional Bible Study Suggestions

- Lives of Elijah, Jonah, Moses
- Book of Job
- Book of Psalms

10 Language acquisition stress

Intense focus on language learning leads to mental exhaustion. You need breaks and physical exercise. You may wonder if you will ever retain the vocabulary and rules of grammar. Even if you have been a "Steady Eddie," you may have mood swings and insecurities you have never felt before. Watching others finish language school while you extend and struggle is tough. You may feel the pressure to perform producing thoughts like, *People are giving a lot of money to us. Why? So I can sit here trying to figure out a language I'll never get?* It may have been a long time since you had that sick feeling when facing exams, but it's back. The wife may have to homeschool the children and use a language tutor while the husband studies full time. When one spouse gets the language and the other doesn't, it adds stress to the marriage. If the wife never gets the language well, when the kids leave, she may be housebound and lonely. One young wife remarked, "My husband got into the language to such a degree that I would lie in bed wanting to hear romantic words, and my husband would ask me about some language problem!"

Advice from the Veterans

In many cultures, your efforts to speak the language are more appreciated than the perfection of your skills. Many consider your effort as a sign that you care. Do not be satisfied with mediocracy, but do not wait for perfection to get started. You will not have deep friendships without the language, so keep working on it. It will come.

Babies introduced to two languages usually start speaking later. They have a hard time distinguishing the two languages at first, but they'll catch up just fine. Get your kids around the nationals. Do not keep them only around North Americans. Kids pick up a lot of their cues from Mom's attitude and reactions. Forgive the redundancy, but beware of watching English TV and internet to escape. This is a struggle for many. There are better choices for using your time. (Use local TV with moderation and discernment).

Devotional Bible Study Suggestions

- Lives of Ruth and Daniel (both had to learn new languages)
- Book of Ecclesiastes
- Book of Revelation

Listen to the Bible on CD in both languages

Goal: Devotions in Bible of host language by year three

Top Ten Contributing Causes for Staying

or

It's not easy, but we'll make it.

This list is also compiled from research of first term missionaries by the Missionary Care Division of ABWE. *This information is shared, not to bring about unhealthy comparisons, but to help you prepare for long-term adjustment.*

Some of the following factors depend on you while others do not. Focus on your own responsibilities to do what you can with God's help. What is lacking, God can supply in other ways.

Do not focus on what is lacking in your own experience thus far. Rather, be thankful for what God has provided and trust Him for the rest.

Remember that your colleagues also have needs and burdens regardless of how long they've been on the field. We are all in need of daily grace and mutual encouragement.

1. Clear call from God

Sensing a definite, undeniable call from God to the ministry will help you stay when almost nothing else will! A recognition and confirmation of that call by your family, friends, and sending church is also important. Many of your fellow laborers experience incredible reversals, persecution, weakness, disappointment, and heartache. Things rarely go as planned or hoped. It is the assurance that you are where you are by divine appointment that quiets the crippling doubts and fears. Stay in the Word. Stay on your knees. Remember, your emotions are fragile and change swiftly. Doubts and fears are normal. You never would have come this far if you were not committed to your calling. That commitment must be renewed again and again (2 Tim 1:6). Exhaustion and disappointment make cowards of us all. *Re-sign* your commitment instead of *resigning* it!

2. Supportive spouse and family

Supportive marriages and families do not just happen. They are the result of the hard work of consistently applying biblical commands and principles. With all the demands of your new transition, do not forget the needs of your family. If you lose your spouse or family, you have lost your effectiveness, the

power of your example, and your entire ministry. It is not a matter of *ministry or family*. Your family is an integral part of your ministry. There is nothing to compare to the power and influence of a whole family serving God together. It is imperative that you make time together as a family. Spend time worshipping, talking, listening, playing, having fun, and going places together. Both parents need to listen to, pray with, and play with the children. Take family vacations regularly. Make *family night* a weekly event and allow the children to take turns choosing the activity. Take time to date your spouse. Get away frequently to talk, listen, evaluate, plan your calendar, and just get caught up with each other. Read good books on marriage and parenting. Talk with couples who have the kind of marriage and family you want to have. Ask for advice from trusted, experienced administrators and leaders.

3. Healthy spiritual life and spiritual disciplines

Many of God's servants have never fully developed the spiritual disciplines of personal worship, solitude, prayer, fasting, Bible reading, memorization, meditation, and journaling. We do not measure spirituality by list keeping. And though legalism, hypocrisy, and prideful comparisons may be found among those who practice the disciplines, it is no excuse to approach the spiritual life carelessly. The power of Christ is imparted to humble, repentant, and dependent worshippers through His Word and prayer. Those who seek will find. Our weakness and need is easily observed through the window of transition stress and language learning. Let your weakness drive you to Christ and to a deeper practice of the spiritual disciplines as an individual, couple, and family. Make time to pray together daily. Find the time that works for you. Change the time when needed, but do not let the changing demands rob you of the disciplines. Spending time each week in prayer with an accountability partner is also recommended. You should receive a copy of *Walk as He Walked*, a fifty day devotional guide, for your first months on the field. Ask your fellow missionaries, your sending pastors, your administrator, or the MCD for additional ideas and advice.

4. Adaptability to new culture and language

Your mission dream of years has finally come true. At first, everything is new and exciting. The smells, sounds, and sights are all things to write home about. But sooner or later, the newness wears off, and the fun turns to frustration. Adaptability is part personality and part choice. While some folks seem to take most anything in stride, others find change a major stress producer. The one thing each of us can do, and must do, is make good choices. You must *choose* to embrace the new culture and make it your own. Examine once again Paul's perspective in his letter to the church in Philippi. He saw his incarceration as his opportunity to reach an unreached people group. He embraced his

limitations as his calling. His captors were his ministry. His suffering was his altar of sacrifice and point of surrender to God's greater purposes. Talk to yourself. Do not just listen to yourself. Pray Scripture back to God with faith in His power and purpose. You will spend the next twenty years figuring out this people, culture, and subculture. Give it time. Give yourself time. Parental example of patience, thankfulness, courage, and positive attitude is crucial in bringing children along in the journey to enculturation.

5. Good relationships with teammates

As team conflict contributes to early attrition, so team harmony, mutual support, respect, and appreciation build long-lasting partnerships in ministry. Interdependence is a powerful bond. This kind of team dynamic is not a fortunate accident. It takes spiritual maturity, humility, and a willingness to accept differences in personality, strengths, weaknesses, and perspectives. Regardless of your youth or inexperience, your example and influence are important to the team. Determine to be an influence of grace and love in your God-given team. Put away a critical spirit and the temptation to focus on specks in your teammates' eyes. Follow Christ's clear directions in Matthew chapters 5, 7, and 18 regarding offenses and forgiveness. Be a strength to your entire team, and the MKs too.

6. Regular supervision and pastoral type care

Those of us in career ministry often forget the necessity of our own need for pastoral care. Added to the unique ministry dynamic is the problem of limited access to pastoral care on the field. Pastoral-type care can come from a number of sources. Your regional administrator is vitally interested in your walk with God as well as your spiritual and vocational success. Take it upon yourself to stay in touch with him. While in language school and in small teams, you may have to be creative to connect with others who will provide wise counsel and regular spiritual input. Your sending pastor, other pastors, a national worker, a missionary from another agency - any or all of these may provide pastoral care on site or from a distance. Do not just wait for it to happen; pursue it. Initiate it from the sources God brings your way.

7. Dependable financial support

ABWE requires full support before you are released to the field. This is to prevent early financial hardship being added to your other pressures. It is your responsibility to keep your supporters regularly informed about your ministry, family, and current needs.

8. Ability to cope with stress and workload

Balance - a common word but an uncommon experience. Like riding a bike for the first time, we tend to overcorrect when losing balance. Finding supportive friends and building relationships is vital; so is the wisdom to know your own limitations. You cannot do everything. It is important to regularly reevaluate your family needs, ministry, health, and perspective. Are you getting enough rest, exercise, recreation, and family time? Is your spiritual life and the practice of the spiritual disciplines in order? Is your perspective one of faith and hope, or one of fear and pessimism? Life and ministry, like a marathon, demands a steady pace that will take you the distance. Your ability to cope with the stress and workload of ministry will require you to know your limits, set priorities, stay flexible, and frequently reevaluate your life.

9. Contact with friends and church back home

Again, the word *balance* is important. On the one hand, you must disconnect from too much dependence on the folks back home so you can fully connect to your new friends and family on the field. On the other hand, maintaining communication and fostering old friendships is a very good thing. You must recognize when you are indulging in an unhealthy escape pattern that is keeping you from building new relationships. We have already emphasized the danger as well as the blessing of technology that allows instant access to folks back home. Enjoy the blessings while being mindful of the dangers.

10. Good relationships with regional administrators and home office

Your regional, country, and field leaders bear great responsibility. Pray for them. Look for ways to encourage and bless them. They went through the same things you are now going through. Like you, each one is a servant of God with their own strengths and weaknesses. They have been asked to take responsibility to provide guidance and direction for your team. They deserve your love and respect. ABWE is not a perfect agency. We are people, and people are far from perfect. This is not an excuse for carnality or carelessness. Seek to implement the "one another" commands of Scripture. God may put the mantle of leadership on your shoulders one day. Great leaders are great followers, too. ■



BOOKS RECOMMENDED BY FELLOW MISSIONARIES

On Being a Servant of God, Warren Wiersbe Baker Publishing
Knowing God, J.I. Packer Blackstone Audio books
Before You Quit, Blaine Allen Kregel Publications
Trusting God, Pursuit of Holiness, etc. Jerry Bridges NAV Press
Instruments in the Hands of the Redeemer, Paul D. Tripp P&R Publishing
The Third Culture Kids Experience, Dave Pollock Nat'l Book Network
Honorably Wounded, Marjory Foyle Monarch Books EMIS/BG Center
Cross-Cultural Conflict, Duane Elmer InterVarsity Press
Psychology of Missionary Adjustment, Marge Jones Gospel Publications
What Missionaries Need to Know about Burnout and Depression, Esther Schubert Olive Branch Publishing
Survival Kit for Overseas Living, L. Robert Kohls Intercultural Press
To the Golden Shore, Courtney Anderson Judson Press
IF, Amy Carmichael Christian Literature Crusade
It's Not All About Me, Max Lucado Ingram Publishing
In the Arena, Isobel Kuhn (OMF) (Especially chapter 4: Crossed Nature)
Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret, Howard Taylor Moody Press
Calm My Anxious Heart (for women), Linda Dillow NAV Press
The Blessing Book, Linda Dillow NAV Press
Don't Let the Goats Eat the Loquat Trees, Thomas Hale Zondervan
Winning the War Within, Charles Stanley Thomas Nelson Publishers
When World's Collide, R.C. Sproul Good News Publishing
Experiencing God, Henry T. Blackaby Lifeway Christian Resources
Love Languages (couples), Smalley and Trent Moody Press
Disciplines of a Godly Man, R. Kent Hughes Good News Publishers
Disciplines of a Godly Woman, Barbara Hughes Good News Publishers
The Spirit of the Disciplines, Dallas Willard Harpercollins
Streams in the Desert, L. B. Cowman Zondervan
How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, Gordon Fee Zondervan
Twelve Ordinary Men, John MacArthur Thomas Nelson
Twelve Extraordinary Women, John MacArthur Thomas Nelson
Alexander, Who's Not (Do You Hear Me? I Mean It!) Going to Move, Judith Viorst, Ray Cruz, and Robin Preiss Glasser Simon & Shuster
Raising Resilient MKs: Resource for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers, Joyce M. Bowers YWAM
Fitted Pieces: A Guide for Parents Educating Children Overseas, Janet R. Blomberg and David F. Brooks ShareEducation.org

Devotional Bible Study Guide

Ask yourself...

WHAT? *What does it say? In your own words, summarize it.*

SO WHAT? *What does it mean? Main point? Paraphrase it.*

NOW WHAT? *What do I do about it? What should I believe?
How should I change what I am doing or not doing?*

Look for the following as you read, and write them down in your journal.

1. **God** – Who He is; what He is like; what He does
2. **Man** – Who we are; what we are like; what we do
3. **Sin** – What does God not want us to do and why
4. **Promise/Principle** – What promises did God make; to whom; and what do we learn from His promises?
5. **Command/Choice/Consequence** – What commands does God give us; what choices are we faced with; what consequences will result from those choices?

Pray it back to God.

Write out two short prayers based on what you have discovered.

Lord, thank You...

(for whatever you have discovered that is important to you)

Lord, please help me...

(ask Him to help you obey what you have learned)

See next page for sample study.



The following sample from 1 John chapter 1 is provided. Be patient with yourself. We all learn at different levels and speeds. God will teach you if you humbly ask Him and patiently learn to read and obey His Word.

Bible Reading Journal Sample

Passage: 1 John 1:1-10 **Memory Verse:** 1 John 1:5
(What? So What? Now What?)

God – Christ is eternal, and revealed to us in flesh and blood

Man – I am a sinner; self deceived; in need of forgiveness

Sin – I may say I follow God, but my life is the real test. If I think I do not sin, I am only deceiving myself. I cannot be forgiven unless I repent and admit my sin to God.

Promise/Principle – Christ came to bring me life, joy and forgiveness. I can only experience that if I come to Him and confess my sin and claim His forgiveness. God promises to forgive me if I repent, confess my sin, and ask His forgiveness. God is still righteous in forgiving me based on Christ's death in my place.

Command/Choice/Consequence – I can choose to harden my heart and refuse to admit my sin. But if I do, I will remain without joy or forgiveness. I can choose to repent and confess my sin and receive the cleansing and joy that Christ gives. To be self-deceived, self-righteous, and self-willed robs me of the forgiveness God offers.

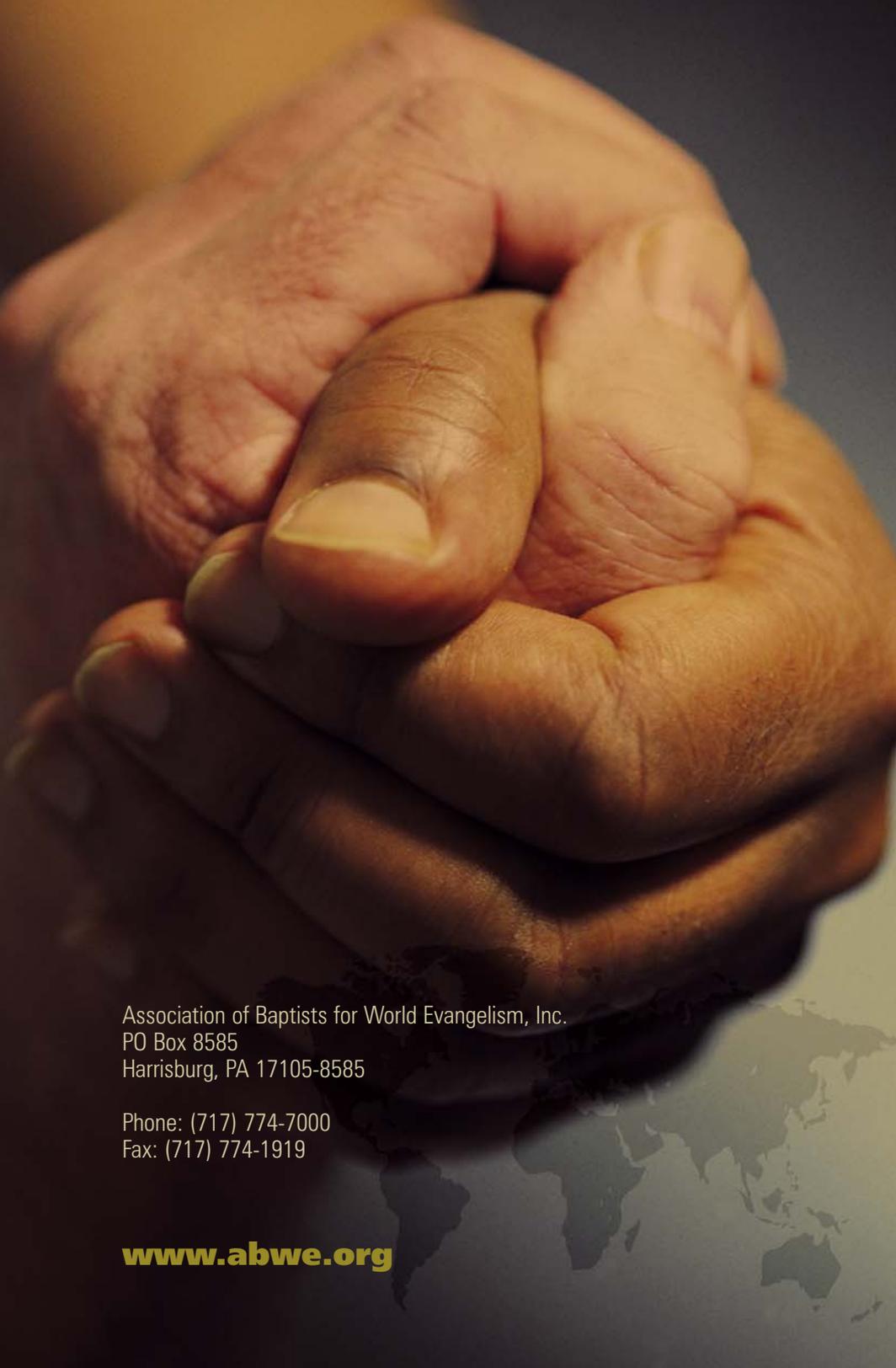
Lord, thank You for coming to bring me forgiveness at so high a cost. You are so full of grace. I am amazed that you would become human, to die for my forgiveness. I praise You!

Lord, please show me my sin. I do not want to live a life of self-deception. I am so thankful for Your cleansing blood. I admit my pride, my lustful thoughts, my critical spirit, my selfishness. Forgive and cleanse me through Your blood shed for me. Let me see Your holiness so I can see myself as I should. I long to see You, touch You, hear Your voice. I thank You that I soon will behold You as you are. ■



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