

Bringing Your Overseas Experience Back Home

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There's no doubt about it. Those who participate in an overseas ministry project come home changed people. Their world has expanded, accompanied by an expanded view of God and the global church He is building. They also return home with a startling perspective on the large disparity that can exist between the realities witnessed overseas and the everyday comforts and privileges afforded those who live in the affluent West.

The new insights can make it difficult to relate to the family you left behind. They have not had the same experiences nor seen the same realities. If not processed correctly, such a gap in shared experiences can lead to relational tensions. It's easy to lapse into unfair criticism of those who have not been exposed to the new vistas seen by the recently returned short-term worker. It's a common reaction to view family members as shallow and self-centered, given their lack of appreciation for the expanded perspectives on the world that you have gained.

Here are some things to minimize such negative tensions and to build positive bridges with the family waiting back home for the short-term mission worker.

Look for ways to share the experience with your family. Make sure they all know that you want to include them. This could be as simple as bringing back gifts for them. It obviously means sharing stories and photos. Let them know you value having them along for the ride. Don't expect them to get news and report on your experiences along with everyone else in your world. Give them an inside scoop!

Pray with your family about the ministry and people. In the first few months back home it's important to surround with prayer the people and ministry you left overseas. Involve your family praying for these new friends around meals and other special times.

Serve in a project together. One of the best ways to grow a heart for missions with your family is to look for ways to serve together in a ministry project. Look for local or regional projects first. They can provide a much easier point of entry. Increasingly, international organizations are also providing opportunities for families to serve together.

Leave the calling to God. You may have come home with a fresh sense of calling from God to pursue a new avenue of ministry, either here or overseas. Make sure to get wise counsel from your church leaders about the prudence of that emerging sense of call. And be sure to not decide for others in your family what God is now calling them to do. Remember, God will not call a couple into missionary service without making it clear to both of them. Your best course of action may be to share, pray, and wait.

Shared by Emmanuel Faith Community Church



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