



## *Reverse Culture Shock Discussion*

### **Team Questions**

These are some very simple yet though provoking questions that are asked during team times such as in the airport, around the breakfast table, on the bus, during scheduled team times, in country and out of country. These questions should be used to create an atmosphere of team, openness and unity. It is the team leader's responsibility to help create this atmosphere throughout the trip.

### **Pre Trip**

- What are some things you want to see God do personally in your life?
- What is something you are afraid of concerning the trip?
- What is one miracle you would like to see God do on the mission field?
- What are some things that could hold you back from giving 100% to this trip? How can your team help you overcome those things?

### **First Few Days of Trip**

- How did you feel when you got off the airplane and saw this new country?
- Does anyone feel homesick? That is a normal feeling to have entering a new country.
- What has been your first impression of the people here?
- What is something God is speaking to you about in your morning quiet times?

### **Mid Trip**

- What do you like about the church services here?
- What is something you love about this country?
- What has been one of your favorite moments so far?
- How is God personally challenging you?
- Are you feeling tired, need some extra strength from God?
- How is your attitude?

### **Last Few Days of Trip**

- As we are getting ready to go home. Lets give 110% while we are still here. How can we do that as a team?
- What has been your KODAK MOMENT during the trip so far? (meaning if you could have taken a picture of that moment and keep it with you forever).

- What is something that you have learned from the people here? How can we incorporate that into our lives back in Canada or USA?
- In reality we are just leaving one mission field and entering the next. What is one goal that you have for when you go home to your mission field?
- While here, we were unable to fully communicate with the people. How does that challenge you to share with the people back home that you can actually speak the same language to?

### **Two Weeks After the Trip**

- How has everyone been doing since you have returned back to the USA?
- Did you experience reverse culture shock coming home?
- What are you more thankful for here at home, now that you see how others live around the world?
- On the mission field you are constantly with a team, now that you are home what "team" have you surrounded yourself with? Part of all of our strength on the field was our team, it is essential that we stay connected to a strong body of believers now that we are home.
- Do you feel more of a burden to reach out to those around you here at home? What is your plan to do that?
- Now that you have been exposed to international missions, are you more motivated to become a globally minded Christian? How can you keep your heart on fire for those around the world, now that you are home?

### **Re-Entry Stress**

This is the process that you may experience upon returning home. Re-entry stress or reverse culture shock, generally is experienced to a greater degree the longer one has been in another country. Disillusionment with America and American Christianity play a part in any re-entry stress that is experienced.

### **Initial Reactions**

If this is your first trip outside your home country you will be exposed to things you have never experienced first hand before, such as the plight and poverty of many in developing countries. It is not uncommon upon returning home to become disturbed and even bitter toward America's opulence and waste.

When you return you will be excited to eat the "Big Mac and large fries" you have been craving. Your family and friends will be proud and excited to see you and you will experience a "high". You have just conquered the unknown, been used greatly by God and you will be the center of attention. Soon, however, this "high" drops and re-entry shock may begin.

Following are a few examples of possible reactions you may experience. Be prepared to deal with life back home in light of your new experience. All short-term ministry/missions workers will experience some degree of re-entry stress.

1. **Self-concept** - Any life-changing experience can cause you to re-evaluate who you are in light of the experience. Questions about the meaning of life and its direction may be a part of the re-entry process. You may decide never to go outside the United States again or you may discover that there is a call on your life to ministry outside the United States. Questioning life can be good, but the uncertainty of the answers may cause some stress.
2. **Value Change and Choice** - Clashes between you and those to whom you return may occur in several different areas, such as material possessions, family life, racial prejudice, national priorities in ecology and politics, and Christian community conflicts. Some workers develop a "holier than Thou" attitude towards those who did not go. This can lead to you becoming disillusioned with Christians at home and cause you to consider them more tolerant of sin and not as committed as the Christians you met while outside the United States.

One missionary worker returning home, from the Far East, shared: "Everybody looks rich. We stayed with good friends in a Western state who complained about the high cost of living. Yet, they are overweight and live like royalty. Many of them were talking about inflation and how they were having to cut corners...but most were wasteful and kept on buying. Why is air-conditioning kept so low? We freeze everywhere we go."

You may face the problem of integrating what you have just seen with what you see around you at home. Your eyes may be opened to the shallowness of Western Materialism and you may want to react by telling others they are wrong to own so many "things", eat so much food and waste so much.

3. **Expectations** - You will have had many expectations for your trip about the culture and language differences, the new and exotic country and God's purpose for you making the trip. However, you may not have expected the reactions you may encounter when you return home. You may find that you feel like a stranger now in your own country. You may have expected your family and friends to be as excited as you are about your experience and become hurt if they show little or no real interest about something that has made a tremendous impact on your life. Realize that many will just not be able to understand what you have been through. This seemingly lack of interest can reinforce in you an opinion that American Christians are just not interested in the rest of the world and are simply lovers and pleasers of self. You must guard yourself from becoming resentful toward family, friends and American Christians.
4. **Sense of Loss** - You may experience a sense of loss over newfound friends and places or from being disconnected from the rest of the team. Your recent experience is not the nitty-gritty reality of everyday life. Being in a strange country, away from all familiar cues and the security of familiar faces and places can facilitate a tendency to become extremely close to fellow team members and when you return home you may experience a sense of void. It may take sometime to readjust to your life as it was before your trip. You

may also feel a loss of purpose and self-importance. God has just used you greatly to minister to the needs of others in a different country and when you return this purpose may seem somewhat lessened.

### **STAGES OF RE-ENTRY**

1. **Initial Euphoria** -- You are pleased to be home and everyone is glad to see you.
2. **Irritability and Hostility** - After the initial euphoria you may become irritated and hostile towards others for any number of reasons.
3. **Gradual Adjustment** - It may take time for you to readjust to the way your life was before your trip.
4. **Adaptation** - You have been changed. Life went on when you were gone and it may take time for you to catch up.

### **RESPONSES TO REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK**

To minimize the effects of re-entry stress find methods of "closure". One example is to stay in touch with other team members after returning home. Be sure you should share things about the present with them and not just the memories of your trip. See your experience realistically and allow God to show you how to use this use it. Have a right perspective of God's total plan.

### **POINTS FOR YOU TO CONSIDER:**

1. Be aware that you may experience some depression, loneliness, fatigue and illness as re-entry symptoms of stress. You can be stressed by either happy or sad events. You may go through a grief process.
2. Be alert to your own expectations and the expectations of others. Value conflicts may occur.
3. Allow for rest, reflection and rejoicing in what you have seen God do. Go over your experiences and ask the Lord to show you the various aspects of your trip and grow from them Evaluate what you have been through.
4. Take your time to readjust. Be patient with others who do not understand what you have experienced.

### **Reverse Culture Shock**

#### **Now that your home....**

Returning to America can be a disturbing mixture of pleasure and pain. Pleasure because you are returning to all you love in the States, and pain at leaving all you have grown to love in your host country. Unfortunately, leaving a new home, new friends, and a new culture you

have grown accustomed to, makes returning to the States quite a bit more complicated than stepping off the plane. A couple things to be prepared for upon re-entry to the United States include the following:

### **Reverse Culture Shock**

Basically, this consists of feeling out of place in your own country, or experiencing a sense of disorientation. While everything is familiar, you feel different. Even walking through the airport and hearing American English spoken can be a very surreal experience.

### **Re-establishing Relationships**

People you were close with when you left, even those you kept in good contact with, will be separated from you by the unique experiences you have had in each other's absence. However, this separation is certainly not permanent, and new experiences can make for some very interesting conversation. Just keep in mind that since both of you have changed, you won't necessarily interact in the same way.

### **Sharing Your Experience**

Since only you have had your experience, there is no possible way that anyone can fully understand what you have gone through. While people will be interested in what you did abroad, nobody will be quite as interested as you – despite your amazing storytelling skills.

### **Readjusting**

Fitting your new life into your old one can be frustrating. Since every country has a unique approach to life, it can be difficult if you're used to operating within cultural mode, or have made that approach to life a part of you, to return to the U.S. where the rules are different. It's easy to become frustrated with aspects of U.S. culture that no longer make sense to you. Try to keep things in perspective. Bear in mind that every country has its flaws and its strengths. Also be prepared to return to all those little trials you left behind you. You might have journeyed far, far away, but they haven't.

Returning home is wonderful in so many ways. You can talk to family and friends without a phenomenal fee, you can eat at your favorite restaurant, sleep in your own bed, and whatever else you were looking forward to doing. However, there is always the danger of falling victim to the "grass is greener syndrome."

Just as it is possible to dramatize the glory of your return home, it is also possible once you've returned home to over-romanticize your experience abroad. Life is never cookie cutter perfect. Home is not the impenetrable haven you might remember it as at times, and life would still not be flawless, even if you were back in the host country you left behind.

A few things might make re-entry a little easier: talk to others who have traveled abroad, keep in touch with those you met abroad, use the emotional momentum to jump into serving the people of Grays Harbor. Make sure to not isolate yourself but to stay connected to your local church and be an active member. Many people are watching you now to see if you will serve the people here as much as you did on the international mission field. Just remember we are missionaries wherever we are at.