

Reflections of a Global Sojourner

Assimilating into various cultures can be both challenging and fulfilling. Our family has lived in a few different cultures which has given me much exposure to various ways of life and a broader worldview. However, there are challenges when integrating into other cultures. One challenge that I have faced as an outsider is having a sense of belonging in the culture where I am living. Learning the language has been one of the best ways for me to overcome that and to greatly reduce cultural stress. It is so fulfilling because it opens up the way into the hearts of the people. One can then better understand who they are and share the gospel with them. Having meaningful relationships with the people has definitely helped me to better adapt into their culture.

The biggest cultural adjustment I faced happened when our family returned to the United States when I was ten years old. We had returned from Mozambique where I had spent most of my growing up years. Besides the fact of longing to be back in Mozambique, trying to fit into the American culture was quite an adjustment for me. I did not know anyone and I felt

like an outsider even at the church we were attending then. Our family's values had changed, and I could not relate to their interests. In the neighborhood where our family lived I tried to make friends and play with the neighbor children. Growing up I was used to a friendly community and making friends

quickly, so it was hard for me when I was rejected by them and told to "get lost." I could not play the sports they played and was not a part of their circle of friends. We had the same nationality, but not the same culture.

It can be challenging for a TCK (Third Culture Kid) to explain where he comes from because of having acculturated into various cultures. A TCK socializes best with other TCK's or family members because they have similar shared experiences and can better understand each other.

It took several years before I started feeling like I belonged in the States. After our family began attending another church, I experienced meaningful friendships with others who had the same values as our family. As I grew older in my teenage years, I faced other challenges. I often felt behind my peers in my knowledge of life skills, which they had grown up with.

More recently our family spent a year and a half in Southeast Asia. I put myself into the work there and had meaningful relationships with many people. After coming back to the States, two things especially helped me adapt back into life in my home culture. Firstly, I realized that it was the Lord's will for me to be in the States, even though it was difficult to leave where we were working and I missed being there. I realized God has a purpose for me being in the States; He has work for me to do here. God is teaching me many things, in particular, about not being critical or judgmental of others who come from a different worldview than my own. Secondly, I have found that being involved in a local church has helped me overcome cultural stress when returning to my home culture. Regular communication with those from the sending church is absolutely essential while on the field. Otherwise, when a missionary returns to his home culture he will feel very disconnected and struggle to find a place to fit in. It takes mutual effort to maintain a meaningful relationship.

In a way this resembles what our life here on earth is supposed to be like. We are just sojourners, someone who lives here temporarily. This world is not our home; we are just passing through. We must maintain a close relationship with our Creator and be active about His purposes to reach the lost world. One day we'll be going to a Home where all cultures will be represented.

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