

Strangers & Pilgrims

We call ourselves “pilgrims” and “strangers” and believe that this world is not our home. Interestingly, foreign missionaries, and even more so – their children, often feel this way in a very physical and sometimes startling way.

After serving the Lord in Africa with my family for nearly ten years, speaking the local language, and blending with the nationals freely and comfortably, there was a nagging realization that I am still strange to these people. Our skin color, unique accent, and American ways of thinking still made us foreigners. I comforted myself with the assumption that in my homeland I would not feel like an odd misfit at all.

Imagine the shock of returning to the U.S. only to realize that I was foreign to this culture also! It is embarrassing to be eighteen years old and not know how to operate a pump at the self-service gas station or simple power tools on a construction site, or to hear people talking about iPods and MP3. “What is that? Is this another planet?!”

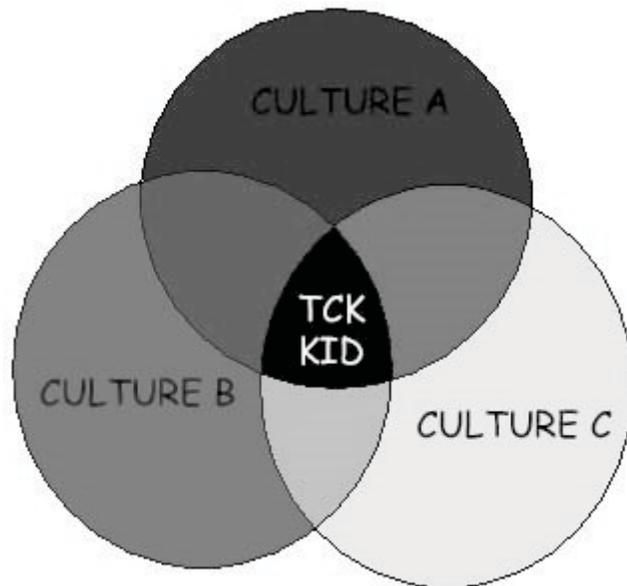
The years in Africa prior to this had involved some painful disappointments and misunderstandings with my dear national friends. Then returning to my homeland only to discover that I was a stranger here presented a temptation, one that I yielded to for awhile – bitterness.

I was not bitter at the nationals, despite the disappointments. Neither was I angry at my parents for taking me to a foreign country. (I only respect

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them highly for their sacrificial love for Christ and obedience to serve Him wherever He leads.) As I entertained frustrations and thoughts of how unfair life was (“Where did I even belong?”), the truth hit home. I was bitter at God! As is true for all of us, He is the One who orchestrates the circumstances of life. For me that meant growing up in another country.

It is important to mention here that my siblings and I really appreciate the way our parents have “softened our landing” back to the States by patiently answering our many questions and explaining the how’s and why’s of American society and church life. Friends have also helped a lot by accepting and trying to understand and by being willing to answer strange and seemingly dumb questions!



I do love Africa and am thankful for the experiences that God used to impact my life. There are many valuable lessons to be learned on a foreign field such as frugality, contentment, and learning to do with less. Another blessing is learning to trust God simply and depend on Him instead of leaning on friends or modern conveniences. Not to be overlooked are the benefits of exposure to another country and culture: learning to love, accept, and relate to people who think, act, and live differently than we do. This does not make them wrong or us right.

The exciting truth then to me is that, despite our limitations or our strengths, God has wisely customized each of our lives to equip us for His purpose. He calls us to use what we have been given to live for His glory – He’s worthy! And by His grace I desire to serve Him with heart, soul, mind, and strength until the trumpet blows and the redeemed from across this globe rise to meet our King!

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