



BACK HOME

Daily reflections on reentry for
those who lived & studied abroad

LISA ESPINELI CHINN

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ISBN # 978-0-9835848-1-0

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the following people: Dr. Bob Osburn, Julia Styles, Lauren Marlowe, and Lea Chinn for their feedback to the early draft of this publication; the many international students who shared their reentry stories with me; and Courtney Letkewicz for her graphic design. *Mahalo* (thank you in Hawaiian) to Leiton E. Chinn, my husband and coworker, for his tireless support and partnership in this endeavor.

INTRODUCTION

"I need to talk, do you have the time?" she asked. I said yes, of course. She then added that another friend of hers was having a rough time reentering home and could use some help. "Can she join us on a conference call?"

"Thanks for listening. Now we feel a lot better. It's good to know that what we are going through is normal," they both said as we ended our conference call.

Sometimes, just a simple conversation and a name for what you are going through make a huge difference in how you transition back home.

But what if you cannot call someone? What if you are feeling lost and confused and there is no one near who understands?

These daily readings, for the first month of your return to your home country, are designed to help you navigate the reentry terrain. This is a booklet of brief thoughts and biblical reflections to help you understand the reentry process and keep your heart and mind focused on God.

The topics are arranged around the different stages one may experience in reentry. Your transition is unique to you and the sequence of topics may not completely correspond with what you are experiencing. So personalize this guide. Mix and match. Put together your own reentry map.

Treat this booklet as your friend and companion. May God use your reflections to help you grow into a godly global citizen and world changer.

Lisa Espineli Chinn
April 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Day 1: THE FUN STAGE: I Love Being Back Home	Day 16: Isolate—Coping Response #2
Day 2: Welcome Home	Day 17: Expectations
Day 3: Uprooted and Transplanted	Day 18: Loneliness
Day 4: New Perspectives	Day 19: Change
Day 5: New Routine	Day 20: THE FIGHT STAGE: I Hate Being Home!
Day 6: The Transition Experience	Day 21: Grief
Day 7: Home?	Day 22: Broken Heart
Day 8: Imitate—Coping Response #1	Day 23: Making Mistakes
Day 9: THE FLIGHT STAGE: I Don't Like Being Home	Day 24: A Critical Spirit
Day 10: Reverse Culture Shock	Day 25: Making Decisions
Day 11: New Me	Day 26: THE FIT STAGE: I Am Home
Day 12: Making Friends Again	Day 27: Integrate—Coping Response #3
Day 13: Memories	Day 28: A Renewed Commitment
Day 14: Confidence	Day 29: "Please Send Someone Else"
Day 15: Who is There to Listen?	Day 30: "For a Time Like This"
	Final Words / Appendix

THE FUN STAGE*: I LOVE BEING BACK HOME

Remember this day and celebrate it each year as a festival in my honor. (Exodus 12:14 CEV)

"I love this place!" a newly arrived international student exclaimed as she saw her American campus. We watched her delight as she absorbed the surroundings and met new people. She was definitely in The Fun Stage of entry transition.

You know the feeling.

In reentry, The Fun Stage is repeated. "It's great to be back home!" said a returnee as she relished the sights, sounds, and smell of home. Everything is wonderful during this phase.

You may be experiencing it right now. You are over jet lag. You have slept well. You have updated your Facebook profile. The friends and family you missed are around you. You have given your presents. You have the food you longed for and the rhythm of life you may have missed.

Life is good.

Remember the Exodus story? God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt and they were to mark that day in their history. They were to annually observe the Passover so that generations to come will always remember.

Enjoy this reentry phase. Be sure you keep some memory markers to help you never forget.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Read Exodus 12.

Celebrate this Fun Stage with an "I'm Back Home!" party.

*There are four stages referred to in the *Stages of Transition* (see Appendix)

WELCOME HOME

You know when I leave and when I get back; I'm never out of your sight. You know everything I'm going to say before I start the first sentence. I look behind me and you're there, then up ahead and you're there, too—your reassuring presence, coming and going. This is too much, too wonderful—I can't take it all in! (Psalm 139:1-6 THE MESSAGE)

"Welcome home!" But is this really home? Perhaps a better greeting would be "Welcome back!" Returning home is like being in two worlds.

Dr. Miriam Adeney, a Christian anthropologist, tells her students who have lived abroad that they "will never be able to go home again...they will probably always leave part of themselves behind, and thereafter will be split...and home may be in more than one place. But that is the price they pay for the richness of having experienced more than one culture deeply."

God knows you and knows your cross-cultural experience. He knows when you left and when you got back! He knows your heart may be in two places now. He understands your excitement about being home and your sadness as well.

Dwell on the knowledge that God knows you. He will not abandon you. He is near you. *"God is our mighty fortress, always ready to help in times of trouble." (Psalm 46:1 CEV)*

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Find someone who has been abroad and share how you are feeling right now.

Memorize Psalm 139:1-6.

UPROOTED AND TRANSPLANTED

By an act of faith, Abraham said yes to God's call to travel to an unknown place that would become his home. When he left he had no idea where he was going. By an act of faith he lived in the country promised him, lived as a stranger camping in tents. Isaac and Jacob did the same, living under the same promise. Abraham did it by keeping his eye on an unseen city with real, eternal foundations—the City designed and built by God. (Hebrews 11:8-10 THE MESSAGE)

Millions of internationally mobile students, immigrants, refugees, and other sojourners share the global experience of being uprooted and transplanted.

You survived and perhaps even thrived in a foreign land. Now you are replanted, back in your own home culture.

You are not alone in your transition experience. God's story revolves around a nomadic people. He chose and called them to a place. They listened to him and moved about, often unsure of the next step ahead.

In Hebrews 11, Abraham's journey is described as an adventure of faith. His trust in God shaped his life and directed his future. How has your cross-cultural journey been an exercise in faith? What future do you envision? Where are you truly headed?

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Read and meditate on Hebrews 11:8-10.

Find a plant that you can transfer to a new container or location. Use it as a visual reminder of your faith journey. Or draw or paint your experience as an uprooted and transplanted person.

NEW PERSPECTIVES

I am creating something new. There it is! Do you see it? I have put roads in deserts, streams in thirsty lands. (Isaiah 43:19 CEV)

Shifts in perspectives are normal after a stint abroad. Now that you are back, you recognize that you have an expanded view of the world, new tastes, affections, and priorities.

Your global awareness has increased—you advocate for a new cause, a need, or a new group of people in the world. Who else shares your passion?

Your palate may have been challenged by new kinds of food and ways of cooking. Are you able to cook these new dishes? Or are there restaurants near you that serve these menus?

Your music taste may now include songs and musicians from another country. Can you download some of their music?

You may have acquired new skills. Where and how can you use them?

Your recreational activities may now include a new sport or games. Are you able to do them back home? With whom?

Your appetite for God's Word and for prayer may have grown. How are you keeping a record of your insights? What resources do you need?

You may now enjoy lively discussions on politics and current affairs. Who has similar interests?

God is doing new things in you! Allow God to form and transform you into an international person who celebrates the good in other cultures.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Describe your "before and after" profile. What were you like prior to your foreign experience, and what are you like now?

NEW ROUTINE

It is wonderful to be grateful and to sing your praises, LORD Most High! It is wonderful each morning to tell about your love and at night to announce how faithful you are. (Psalm 92:1-2 CEV)

You may feel disoriented upon returning home. Your former routines have been altered and now you are trying to establish some normalcy in your life.

There is comfort in routines. They take away the feeling of foreignness. Schedules help you find a life rhythm.

The psalmist gives you a clue to his routine in Psalm 92. He identified what was good: to praise God and make music. His morning ritual was to proclaim God's love. In the evening, he proclaimed God's faithfulness. He began and ended the day with God.

After returning home, you may have plunged back into a very busy life. You had no time to stop and establish a routine. People make demands on you, and you feel pulled in many different directions. Or you may experience the opposite. You have time on your hands. Even if you do not know what is happening next, try to establish some pattern in your life. It could be as simple as a cup of tea or coffee in the morning or a walk in the neighborhood or a daily time in God's Word.

Anchor your days with some routine. Identify the places in your schedule where you can stop to breathe and connect with God. Guard those quality times with God. They are your lifeline.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Work out a simple schedule and share it with a friend for accountability.

THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCE

Moses and the Israelites sang this song in praise of the LORD: I sing praises to the LORD for his great victory! He has thrown the horses and their riders into the sea. (Exodus 15:1 CEV)

The people complained and said, "Moses, what are we going to drink?" (Exodus 15:24 CEV)

Peaks and valleys characterize normal transitions. One day you feel great, another day you are sad and confused.

The exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land is a riveting story. God intervenes through one miracle after another. Suspense builds as we wait to see if Pharaoh will release God's people. We feel the energy rush as they prepare the Passover meal. If you trace the emotional responses of the Israelites to this great escape, you will find ups and downs.

After crossing the Red Sea, Moses and the Israelites sang to the Lord. They were exuberant at what had just transpired. But this feeling was short-lived. After a few days in the desert, the Israelites grumbled, "What are we going to drink?" (Exodus 15:24 CEV). God provided water for them water and led them to 12 springs and 70 palm trees!

In the second month, the complaining started again: "We wish the LORD had killed us in Egypt. When we lived there, we could at least sit down and eat all the bread and meat we wanted. But you have brought us out here into this desert, where we are going to starve." (Exodus 16:3 CEV)

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Where are you in your reentry transition? Up or down?

What have you rejoiced in and what have you complained about?

IMITATE—COPING RESPONSE #1

I am not anyone's slave. But I have become a slave to everyone, so that I can win as many people as possible... When I am with people whose faith is weak, I live as they do to win them. I do everything I can to win everyone I possibly can. I do all this for the good news, because I want to share in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:19, 22-23 CEV)

To learn a new culture, some imitation is necessary. Anthropologists call this behavior "going native." Similarly, readjusting to your country may require that you follow its patterns and norms. Like a new foreigner, you observe. You make a tentative interpretation of what you see. Then you try out your new understanding. You receive feedback (verbal and nonverbal) and you make the necessary adjustments.

However, you are not a distant participant of your culture. You may feel that you are in it but not of it. The apostle Paul gives us a very good principle of cross-cultural living: Although he was free to relate with anyone he chose, he intentionally made himself enter the world of those who were different from him. His motivation was to build bridges for the gospel.

Imitation of another culture does not have to be complete or indiscriminate. You decide what you can copy. Some imitation is necessary to fit back in your home country, but it should be done without loss of personal values or newly acquired convictions.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Who are the people in your life now whose worldviews are significantly different from yours?

How are you *entering* their worlds?

HOME?

This is GOD's Word on the subject: "As soon as Babylon's seventy years are up and not a day before, I'll show up and take care of you as I promised and bring you back home. I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for. When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen." (Jeremiah 29:10-12 THE MESSAGE)

While abroad you missed a lot of things about home. Now you are back and appreciating those things you have missed. Your culture? Your mother's cooking? Some solitude? But even as you enjoy these features of home, you feel *out of sync* with life as a whole. You may feel like you are walking against the flow of traffic and the road seems uneven.

How do you move on?

God has a plan in all these transitions. Jeremiah reminded the exiles in Babylon to embrace their new home and engage in its life and welfare. (Jeremiah 29) In the midst of change, God knew what he was doing and would take care of them. The exiles had to believe that God indeed had a plan for them. It was during this foreign sojourn that they would call on God and God would draw near to them. Experiencing transition is a unique opportunity to trust God.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

God is drawing you to himself during this adjustment period. What are you discovering about him and about yourself? Journal your answers or share with a friend.

THE FLIGHT STAGE: I DON'T LIKE BEING HOME

*Our LORD, everything you do is kind and thoughtful, and you are near to everyone whose prayers are sincere.
(Psalm 145:17-18 CEV)*

As you read about these stages, remember they are not necessarily predictions of what you will experience. They are descriptions of what you might experience.

So, today may be a different story. You experienced the Fun Stage earlier, but it left as quickly as it came. Now you are struggling with a different set of emotions. For example, your patience is short with people who are too nosy or too independent. You may be disappointed that friends show little interest in your life abroad. You may miss the freedom you enjoyed away or the vibrant spiritual environment you had while you were away. Home may be just plain boring to you now.

Welcome to the reentry Flight Stage. During this phase, life at home is not meeting your expectations. You may want to flee—to leave and return to where you just came from. Or, you may isolate yourself socially and emotionally.

Accept how you are feeling, but do not make any rush decisions.

The psalmist reminds you that God is near to all who call on him. God knows your frustrations, your irritations, your disappointments. Knowing that God is close at hand makes a world of difference in your reentry experience. Call on him often.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Write God a complaint letter. Express how you honestly feel about this stage of transition.

REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

Please listen, God, and answer my prayer! I feel hopeless, and I cry out to you from a faraway land. Lead me to the mighty rock high above me. You are a strong tower, where I am safe from my enemies. (Psalm 61:1-3 CEV)

After studying in the U.S., I returned home to the Philippines and was very shocked by what I witnessed: drivers weaving in and out of lanes, horns blaring, and a mob of people trying to get on jeepneys and buses without forming a line. I was scared for my life!

Reverse culture shock is the temporary feeling of discomfort, disbelief, and dislocation when you face life back home. It is a normal emotional response to the customary ways things are done or to the new realities that define your present culture.

Reentry culture shock is often more difficult than culture shock because you did not prepare for nor expect it. It may leave you feeling confused, angry, frustrated, isolated, and lonely.

The psalmist cried out to God in times of distress. Although his trouble was different from yours, it is the same God who hears and answers.

Does God understand reverse culture shock? Of course, he does. His help may come through information (that it is a normal part of transition and will diminish over time) or through transformation (changing your attitude, making you more patient and less judgmental).

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

List the things that are causing your reverse culture shock.

Name the ones that you can change and those that you cannot.

NEW ME

Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. He led the flock to the west end of the wilderness and came to the mountain of God, Horeb. The angel of GOD appeared to him in flames of fire blazing out of the middle of a bush. He looked. The bush was blazing away but it didn't burn up. (Exodus 3:1-2 THE MESSAGE)

You know that things are different now. Your mind and heart have been stretched. They now include a new people, a new language, and a new way of looking at the world.

But you feel alone.

Others, in the past, have had similar experiences. Moses, for example, went through multiple transitions. He was born of Hebrew parents, adopted by an Egyptian princess but nursed by his own mother. He was exposed to the Egyptian culture and familiar with a privileged life. But he was also aware of his heritage and the plight of his people. His patriotic and violent response to their slavery left an Egyptian dead and Moses running for his life.

He married while away from home. Exodus 2:22 records that Moses named his firstborn son Gershom, to remind him that he had become a foreigner in an alien land. Living in the desert, he knew he was a different person from the man who fled Egypt.

In the desert God spoke to him.

Sometimes, returning home may feel like a desert. But God has not forgotten you or his purpose for you.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

What is God saying to you in your "desert"?

Who are you now becoming?

Ask a friend or a family member to identify what is different about you now.

MAKING FRIENDS AGAIN

It's better to have a partner than go it alone. Share the work, share the wealth. And if one falls down, the other helps, But if there's no one to help, tough! (Ecclesiastes 4:10 THE MESSAGE)

Do you feel like you are starting all over again with your friendships after having been abroad? Do the friends you left behind understand what you are going through? Do you feel like you are in a friendship limbo? Then it is time to do a reentry social assessment.

As much as you still care for your friends here at home, the fact is they do not share your foreign experience. They can understand and empathize up to a point. But you feel that you have moved on and they have not. Or they have also moved on, and you missed out on important events in their lives. This does not mean changing your friends. But it may mean expanding your friendships.

After your time abroad, you will discover that you are now drawn to people who have had similar experiences. You naturally seek them out and attend events or join groups that reinforce your cross-cultural experience. You expand your Facebook friends to include those who have lived overseas.

This is a normal part of reentry.

The wise words in the book of Ecclesiastes remind you that you cannot go it alone. You need friends. You need other people in your life to help you along.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Make a list of your new interests and passions.

Who may be some people who share those interests? How can you meet them?

MEMORIES

Praise the Lord of lords. God's love never fails. Only God works great miracles. God's love never fails. (Psalm 136:3-4 CEV)

Memories of your time away from home are all you have now. They are packed away in your heart and mind to be retrieved often.

God wants his people to remember well. He does not want them to forget his mighty works. He recounts his interventions in history, and he wants his people to mark those times and places.

A healthy memory of God's work becomes the seedbed for gratefulness. The more you feed your mind on God's acts in your life, the more you will well up in thanksgiving, hope, and faith.

Returning to your country is a good time to check your memory bank. What deposits have you made while you were away from home?

One of the things I did before I returned to the Philippines after completing my studies, was to write down all the different ways God had answered my prayers. For example, I had asked God for a friend—and I filled a page with names of the many different friends I had made while in America.

Psalm 136 is a list of God's acts in Israel's history. The refrain "God's love never fails" is included after every mention of God's activity. The recitations of those acts provoke the remembrance of God's enduring love.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Read Psalm 136. Write your own version.

CONFIDENCE

Jesus knew that he had come from God and would go back to God. He also knew that the Father had given him complete power. So during the meal Jesus got up, removed his outer garment, and wrapped a towel around his waist. He put some water into a large bowl. Then he began washing his disciples' feet and drying them with the towel he was wearing. (John 13:3-5 CEV)

Confidence is inner poise, a quiet assurance that you know who you are and where you are from. Global travel and cross-cultural living, however, can challenge that self-confidence. An international student from Denmark who lived in my home in the Philippines remarked about her experience, "I feel like a fish out of water." She was clueless about the nuances in my culture and felt out of place.

Although you may have gained more confidence while living abroad, returning home may temporarily undermine your self-assurance.

You may be struggling spiritually and doubting God's power to change you or your situation. You remember his interventions in your life while away from home and now God seems distant and unconcerned. One returned international student said that his trust in God plummeted as he was jobless for months.

Before Jesus washed his disciples' feet, John 13 tells us four things that Jesus knew: (1) his time on earth was ending (2) his power, (3) his origin, and (4) his destination. Knowing who he was, Jesus served.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

What truths about God or yourself do you need to remember?

How will those truths help you serve others?

WHO IS THERE TO LISTEN?

If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love. Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. (1 Corinthians 13:3-4a THE MESSAGE)

You are full of stories from your experience abroad. Naturally, you want some listeners. Unfortunately, some people may not show great interest or they may be too preoccupied with their own lives to stop and listen to your stories.

So, do you stop sharing?

An important part of your reentry is to be able to share and process your experience with others. But you do not want to always be the center of attention, either. Other people moved on with their lives while you were away and they may also want you to listen to their stories.

The apostle Paul reminds you not to think of yourself only. To show love toward others means that you care for them more than yourself. So make the first move. Ask others how they are doing. Show genuine interest.

But also pray for some good listeners to your stories to. Wait for God's provision.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Make an appointment with someone you know who has been abroad. Share your stories with that person.

Who may need your listening ear as well?

ISOLATE—COPING RESPONSE #2

The holy LORD God of Israel had told all of you, "I will keep you safe if you turn back to me and calm down. I will make you strong if you quietly trust me." (Isaiah 30:15 CEV)

Cross-cultural living is stressful. You know that. You made efforts to understand the new culture. It may have been invigorating, but you also felt exhausted.

Isolation, then, is a favorable response when you need a break from cross-cultural fatigue. This may mean literally isolating yourself from others or from the source of tension. Or you may choose to detach yourself from all that is going on.

Now that you are back home, you may be experiencing the same emotion. You have not lived at home for a period of time, and you need space to re-adjust.

There is a place for appropriate isolation without the loss of opportunities to grow, relate, and interact with the home culture.

God uses isolation to recharge your physical, social, and cultural batteries. He also uses those times of solitude to nourish you spiritually.

Renew your strength for cross-cultural living through regular isolation, and feed your soul with space and rest. Allow God to speak in the stillness and in the boundaries you have created.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

When was the last time you isolated yourself from people or the pace of life back home? How was that isolation nourishing?

Review your schedule. When can you pull away and find some physical and spiritual rest? Carve out that time and guard it.

EXPECTATIONS

Don't worry about anything, but pray about everything. With thankful hearts offer up your prayers and requests to God. Then, because you belong to Christ Jesus, God will bless you with peace that no one can completely understand. And this peace will control the way you think and feel. (Philippians 4:6-7 CEV)

When expectations exceed reality, you are happy. When they do not match reality, you are disappointed or even depressed. But when your expectations are realized, you are content.

What were your hopes for your reentry? Did you have a realistic estimation of life back home and the changes you have undergone?

Living with unmet or unrealistic expectations can make your reentry difficult. People are not responding to you the way you had hoped. Life is not as easy as you had imagined. Little things are bothering you more than you realized. Colleagues are not as welcoming as you had envisioned. You haven't found a job.

Once you realize the source of your disappointment or misery, you can make the appropriate adjustments. As you have a better grasp of what your new life will be like, lower your expectations to match life. And be grateful.

Paul encouraged the Philippians not to worry, but instead to present to God their requests with thanksgiving.

It is easy to complain and grumble when things do not turn out as you had wished. A complaining attitude will derail you and breed negativity. When you decide to be grateful, you see things differently. Annoyances shrink into insignificance. Irritations do not linger.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

What expectations did you come home with?

What are you disappointed about?

How does Philippians 4:6 apply to your situation?

LONELINESS

I am poor and needy, but, LORD God, you care about me, and you come to my rescue. Please hurry and help. (Psalm 40:17 CEV)

Reentry "blues" are normal. They are sad feelings related to missing your friends and experiences abroad. The longing for past adventures and relationships comes with the reentry transition. This sorrow may also be caused by not having anyone nearby who understands your situation.

In the midst of your transition, you realize very quickly that life at home did not stop when you were gone. Your friends' lives moved on while you were away. Siblings grew up. You may have missed some significant events in your family's and friends' lives. And change did not happen in only one direction—your life has also moved on. You changed in many different ways. Consequently, you feel alone.

The psalmist was honest about his condition before God. He acknowledged his poverty and need. As the same time, he held on to what he knew to be true: God cares for him and comes to his rescue.

During this difficult time, cry out to God. Jesus understands your circumstance. He gave you his Holy Spirit as your Comforter and Counselor. He is the one who comes alongside. (John 14)

Remember, you are not meant to follow Jesus alone. He meant for you to follow him in the company of others. Reconnect with your community or church. Or find a new community to belong to.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

When you are feeling lonely, look around, and reach out to someone who may be lonelier than you.

CHANGE

When we were children, we thought and reasoned as children do. But when we grew up, we quit our childish ways. (1 Corinthians 13:11 CEV)

Many returnees do not recognize how much they have changed. One international student said he did not think he had changed at all! It was when he was back in his country that the changes became apparent.

Some changes may be more obvious than others. For example, you may now speak another language fluently. You have a passion for a group of people that you never had before. World news interests you. You are careful with how you spend your money. Or you now prefer a slower pace of life.

If you became a follower of Jesus while away from home, you have returned with a new Master. His words and desires are most important to you now. Because of this new loyalty you may feel like a misfit. As one returnee expressed it, "I feel like a foreigner in my own country."

In 1 Corinthians 13, the famous chapter on love, the apostle Paul contrasts love with other spiritual gifts that will cease or pass away. In the context of things that are temporary and incomplete, he gives illustrations of how we change from a child to a mature person and from seeing in a mirror dimly to seeing fully and face-to-face.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

In what ways did you mature while away from home? What childish ways did you put away?

What are the changes you have experienced as a follower of Jesus?

THE FIGHT STAGE: I HATE BEING HOME!

But I never really left you, and you hold my right hand. Your advice has been my guide, and later you will welcome me in glory. (Psalm 73:23-24 CEV)

While not all returnees reach the Fight Stage, you may have descended to it. Now you really hate being home. It is far from all that you had hoped for. You are grieving the loss of your friends abroad. You miss them. You do not even want to make new friends anymore. In other words, you are miserable.

People are often surprised by how difficult this part is on the reentry side of transition. Most people prepare for life in another country, but they do not prepare for life back home.

Although your anger, disappointments, and intense reverse culture shock are valid feelings during this period, you do not need to stay here forever. This phase is normal, but temporary.

In Psalm 73, the writer agonizes over his life in comparison with those who reject God. It seems unfair that his life looks dismal next to those who deny God. He acknowledges before God how he feels. "Once I was bitter and brokenhearted. I was stupid and ignorant, and I treated you as a wild animal would." (vv. 21-22 CEV) Instead of God's abandonment, he experiences God's nearness and company.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Meditate on Psalm 73:21-26.

GRIEF

Beside the rivers of Babylon we thought about Jerusalem, and we sat down and cried. We hung our small harps on the willow trees. Our enemies had brought us here as their prisoners, and now they wanted us to sing and entertain them. They insulted us and shouted, "Sing about Zion!" Here in a foreign land, how can we sing about the LORD? (Psalm 137:1-4 CEV)

You should be happy—you are back home! But you are feeling sad. Why do you find yourself on the verge of tears at the most unusual times? Why are you irritable and easily annoyed? Where are these feelings coming from?

My guess is that you are missing the people, the culture, the country, the experience, the team. You are grieving. One study abroad returnee said that she was depressed the whole first year back. She did not know what to do with her grief.

Giving a name to a feeling or an experience is a helpful step in the transition process. Tears and sadness are all part of grieving. It helps to talk about what and who you are missing.

The Israelites were exiles in a foreign land and they were missing Jerusalem. They wept when they remembered their homeland. You may feel the same way for the country you have left behind.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Look at your photos, souvenirs, and videos. Remembering people and events that were significant in your life abroad will bring comfort.

Talk about your foreign experience.

BROKEN HEART

Then Jesus made a circuit of all the towns and villages. He taught in their meeting places, reported kingdom news, and healed their diseased bodies, healed their bruised and hurt lives. When he looked out over the crowds, his heart broke. So confused and aimless they were, like sheep with no shepherd. (Matthew 9:35-36 THE MESSAGE)

After spending a few months in Asia working with a ministry among women prostitutes, a recent college graduate said to me, with tears in her eyes, "I listened to their stories and they broke my heart. What should I do now?"

"I believe God wants to rearrange your heart," I responded. "With your broken heart, you are now ready for that process. Listen to how God may want you to live differently from now on."

What broke your heart while away from home? Or, perhaps your heart is newly broken by what you see in your own country. You were shielded from poverty and pain while away from home, but now you witness them regularly.

In Matthew 9:37-38, Jesus was moved with compassion over the condition of the people he encountered. Their needs were great and he instructed his disciples, "A large crop is in the fields, but there are only a few workers. Ask the Lord in charge of the harvest to send out workers to bring it in." (CEV)

Who were the "confused and aimless" people you saw while away from home? Who are the oppressed in your country?

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Think of ways you can reach out to the needy in your community. Volunteer with a local church or organization.

How has God changed your prayer life as a result of your time abroad?

What are you asking God for since you returned?

MAKING MISTAKES

But if we confess our sins to God, he can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away. (1 John 1:9 CEV)

Of course you will make mistakes. Everyone does. As a new returnee, your mistakes may be cultural or relational. For example, you had forgotten that people back home speak in indirect ways, and your straightforward approach may have hurt someone. Or your concept of time may have changed, and you offend people by being late to your appointments. These mistakes or cultural blunders are clearly part of readjusting to life back home.

I remember how embarrassed my sister was when I wore casual clothes to an event. I had forgotten how dressed up people were back home. Another returnee assumed there was always food in the pantry and offended the host when he was told they do not keep a supply of food like they do in the United States.

Mistakes are unintentional actions that do not spring out of a selfish or proud heart. These errors are easily corrected with appropriate apology. However, your innocent mistakes can turn to sin when you do not accept correction and arrogantly insist on your ways. In those times, remember to ask for forgiveness from God and the people you have wronged.

Do not let your mistakes keep you from moving on. Learn from them just as you did when you were in another culture. Someday, others will benefit from your experiences.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

What mistakes can you laugh about?

What lessons can you share with future returnees?

A CRITICAL SPIRIT

My dear friends, you should be quick to listen and slow to speak or to get angry. If you are angry, you cannot do any of the good things that God wants done. (James 1:19-20 CEV)

While away from home, you acquired appreciation for new ways of doing things and new cultural values. As you miss your life overseas, you may also find yourself being critical of how people live their lives at home.

You may ask these questions: Why are people so disorganized? Why are they so nosy and inquisitive? Why are people so individualistic? Why are they so materialistic? Why are there so many social rituals? Why don't people stop to visit and talk? Why are people preoccupied with sports? Why do they spend so much money on worthless things; what about helping the poor?

You have experienced another culture beyond your own. You are now seeing your own culture through the lens of another culture. What works for one lifestyle may not necessarily work for another.

The book of James has a good reminder for you. When you take time to listen and are slow to get angry or judge, you will have a better grasp of a situation. In the same way, when you take time to relearn your culture, you will have a more accurate assessment of why people behave the way they do.

What are some ways to relearn your culture? Who will be your "cultural informants" to keep you current in your own culture?

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Spend a day looking for the good and positive things in your people and culture.

MAKING DECISIONS

All of you young people should obey your elders. In fact, everyone should be humble toward everyone else. The Scriptures say, "God opposes proud people, but he helps everyone who is humble." Be humble in the presence of God's mighty power, and he will honor you when the time comes. God cares for you, so turn all your worries over to him. (1 Peter 5:5b-7 CEV)

What decisions are you facing now?

You may be surprised that decision making has become complicated and stressful since you returned home. You now have more people, factors, and options to include in your considerations. Additionally, you have changed, and your approach to life now may be significantly different.

Are you weighing whether something is right or wrong? Is it about a personal preference? Who are you trying to please in your decisions? What does the Bible say about the issue? Do you have adequate information? Whatever decision you make, it will stretch your faith in God.

The apostle Peter's advice, therefore, is timely. Writing to the elders and the young men of the scattered church, he exhorts them to have the winning attitude of humility as they relate to one another and to God. God is on their side when they are humble. Approach God in humility as you face tough decisions, and give him your worries, for he cares about you. Trust him for direction and for wisdom, and believe that he has your best in mind, always.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Meditate on Proverbs 3:5-6.

What help is available to you as you make decisions at this time?

THE FIT STAGE: I AM HOME

Take a good look at God's wonders—they'll take your breath away. He converted sea to dry land; travelers crossed the river on foot. Now isn't that cause for a song? (Psalm 66:5-6 THE MESSAGE)

You are coming out of the bottom of the *Stages of Transition* (see Appendix). It is a great feeling! The clouds are disappearing and you are doing well. Also you have been back home longer and given yourself time to readjust.

At this stage, you are able to find the balance of what it means to be both a foreigner and a resident in your own culture. You are beginning to fit because you embrace the changes you have gone through and are finding your new voice and place back home. Your new identity is emerging and your confidence is evident. You love being home and you are blessing others.

Things are looking up.

You may want to rejoice like the psalmist: "Take a good look at God's wonders!" You have come out of the dark and lonely Flight or Fight Stage! Recognize God's hand in your transition, and praise him.

Caution: The reentry transition experience will take you through different stages over a period of time. You may also find that certain parts of your life may be in the Fit Stage while others are in the Fight Stage, and so on.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

What dreams do you have now?

Look around and ask God to show you:

- What in his creation needs stewarding?
- What in your society needs building and developing?

INTEGRATE—COPING RESPONSE #3

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. (John 1:14 THE MESSAGE)

While it was still night, way before dawn, he got up and went out to a secluded spot and prayed. (Mark 1:35 THE MESSAGE)

Later Jesus and his disciples were at home having supper with a collection of disreputable guests. Unlikely as it seems, more than a few of them had become followers. (Mark 2:15 THE MESSAGE)

Integration is merging with life back home as the new you.

Histories of nations have been rewritten because of the influence of returnees. You are among those whom God will use to influence others for good and for God's glory. You want to change your world. You are globally competent with a facility in more than one language and culture. You have ideas to improve life.

As you integrate, merge wisely and carefully.

To maintain some amount of balance and sanity in your home country, appropriate isolation is necessary. To readjust, a good dose of imitation is a must. To be effective back home, integration is indispensable. Use all three appropriately.

Jesus knew how to live in another culture: his values were out of this world, yet he entered the world becoming like us (imitation—John 1:14); he retreated for solitude (isolation—Mark 1:35); and he was fully involved in the life and pain of the people (integration—Mark 2:15).

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

Imitation, isolation, and integration. How balanced are these responses in your life at the moment?

A RENEWED COMMITMENT

Worship the LORD, obey him, and always be faithful. Get rid of the idols your ancestors worshiped when they lived on the other side of the Euphrates River and in Egypt. But if you don't want to worship the LORD, then choose right now! Will you worship the same idols your ancestors did? Or since you're living on land that once belonged to the Amorites, maybe you'll worship their gods. I won't. My family and I are going to worship and obey the LORD! (Joshua 24:14-15 CEV)

A clear transition was about to happen. Joshua was old and about to die, and God had some words for the leaders of the tribes of Israel. In the first half of Joshua 24, God reviewed his *personal* involvement in their history as they moved from place to place. In the second half of the chapter, Joshua called for a choice, a decision.

Who would Israel serve? The Lord, the living God, who acted and intervened in their history, or the gods (idols) of their past or present location?

Who will you serve? While away from home, you may have been tempted to worship the idols of that land (materialism, external appearance), or perhaps you are being lured by the idols in your home country (money, productivity, expectations).

Now is a good time to renew your commitment to Jesus Christ. He alone is to be worshiped. To him alone belongs your devotion and loyalty.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

What *idols* do you need to throw away?

Write your own prayer of recommitment and share it with a friend.

“PLEASE SEND SOMEONE ELSE”

But the LORD answered, “Who makes people able to speak or makes them deaf or unable to speak? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Don’t you know that I am the one who does these things? Now go! When you speak, I will be with you and give you the words to say. Moses begged, “LORD, please send someone else to do it.” (Exodus 4:11-13 CEV)

How may God want to use you and your experience abroad now that you are back home?

Consider another hero of our faith.

Read Exodus 1-4.

Moses had been away from Egypt for many years. He had married and was raising his family in a foreign land. One ordinary day God breaks into his routine with an astonishing revelation: He is the God worshiped by his ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Ex 3:6) Then God proceeded to unveil his plan and told Moses to go before Pharaoh and lead his people out of Egypt. (Ex 3:10)

He was taking care of sheep, but now he is being told to lead a nation and confront Pharaoh! Understandably, he felt intimidated and inadequate. He gave all kinds of excuses but God had an answer for all of them. In desperation, Moses asked God to send someone else. (Ex 4:13)

God provided Aaron as a helper for Moses. Together they led the people.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

What may God be calling you to do now that you are back home?

What excuses keep you from doing it?

Who may be an *Aaron* in your life to help you?

“FOR A TIME LIKE THIS”

If you don’t speak up now, we will somehow get help, but you and your family will be killed. It could be that you were made queen for a time like this!” (Esther 4:14 CEV)

The story of Esther weaves together the unforeseen opportunities that opened up for a young woman who was an orphan, a Hebrew exile, a minority, and a foreigner. She moved from being in the shadows of her cousin, Mordecai, to being the sole person positioned to turn the destiny of her people. But it did not happen overnight.

Esther replaced Queen Vashti after a long countrywide search. Prior to becoming queen, Esther lived a life of long obedience and loyalty to her cousin. As the story unfolded, Esther, encouraged and challenged by Mordecai, made a decision to use her position to appeal to the king for her people. She embraced her *kairos* moment—that opportune time to step forward and make a difference.

Maybe God brought you back home for such a time as this. God has a great purpose for you.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

What “time” is it in your life, in your professional calling, in your community, and in your country’s history? What role may you play in the salvation of your people?

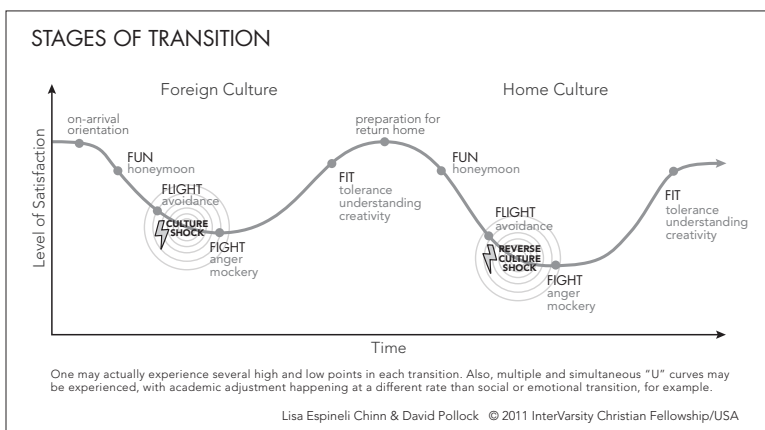
Esther did not rise to her place of influence and power without Mordecai. Who do you have in your life now to challenge you and open opportunities for you to serve and grow?

FINAL WORDS

You may have lived in many places and will likely move or travel again. You will always be a temporary sojourner wherever you go. But you are made for a permanent home in a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. That is your forever home: God's presence where there is fullness of joy!

The last weeks were just the beginning of a new life ahead of you. These readings covered only the basic topics of your reentry experience. You may find that you have more questions and need additional help in other areas. Seek assistance from others who have experienced reentry. Perhaps your pastor or another mature Christian can also help. The revised *Think Home* workbook has new sections that can also assist you and is available at the InterVarsity Store (tiny.cc/t-home).

APPENDIX



This chart is available as a bookmark at the InterVarsity Store (tiny.cc/bkmlk).