

Transitioning

As most of you know, I've lived in Africa for the past 4 ½ years. I was given the grace to work with those living with HIV/AIDS. My role was to help the Kenyan and Sudanese churches respond to the pandemic with a Christ-centered HIV/AIDS approach. This work involved teaching HIV/AIDS prevention and education as well as implementing community outreach projects to those infected. Of the five projects I help to start, four of them are still operating under the leadership of the nationals. In addition to the HIV/AIDS work, I also began a prison ministry in a maximum security prison just outside of Nairobi. And praise the Lord, this ministry is also still going strong!

All things came together nicely toward the end of my term and I had a peace about leaving Africa. I was looking forward to going home seeing my family and friends. I didn't anticipate reverse culture shock because I had visited the States periodically without any problems. I didn't need to read the literature about "re-entry to my home country".

Oh was I wrong about that one! For reasons I didn't foresee I unexpectedly experienced a big dose of reverse culture shock. It came to me in terms of a loss of identity as I was no longer an "African missionary". I lost my home because this time I wasn't returning to Kenya, in fact all of my belongings there were once again gone. I didn't have a home here in my home country. My friends and family had continued to live their lives while I was gone, which resulted in some now being married, some with children and some had moved away from the area. The ones who remained in the St. Petersburg area worked during the day and their evenings and weekends were busy. While I understood all of this, I still found myself at a loss of what to do with myself. I was taking a graduate level theological course but I still had a considerable amount of free time, especially during the day. However, I knew that soon the doors would open to my next ministry and I'd be developing resources and raising funds in full swing, so I tried to enjoy this season.

Some may think WOW! How great! But my reality was such that I didn't have much money to spend as support typically lowers when a missionary is in their home country, even though in most cases the cost of living is more expensive. I was no exception from this trend. I came from a place where people were always around, and now I could go days without seeing anyone if I wanted. I struggled with depression and at times found it difficult to leave the house. Depression is real and Christians aren't immune to it. However since my foundation in the Word and trust in the Lord is strong, I found that as long as I turned my face to Him (which wasn't always easy) then He was faithful to be there and minister to me. His Presence is always there when we call on Him.

The last several months have been some of the most challenging for me in my missionary career.



Me and Mom at Christmas Time



Left to right: Vero, Ginger, Mary, Tiffany, me & Anne

Since I knew that Jesus was with me, the question remained ‘How long will this season last?’ I was so frustrated answering “I don’t know” when asked about my future plans. In reality, I knew God had a plan but for whatever reason I wasn’t privy to it. I had to wait and trust.

I write in hopes that by sharing this you might have a better understanding of what it’s like to be on furlough and/or in a time of transition. While I was happy to be home enjoying the fellowship with my family, friends and home group, I was also very lonely at times and quite honestly tired of being in a “holding pattern”. Of course it will be different with every missionary, but I think most will also feel the isolation during the day and the loss of identity if they’re transitioning as well. I think the best thing is to understand that a big part of being a missionary comes with “I don’t know” answers because our lives wait upon Him...and God’s a bit difficult to rush!

After five long months of not knowing, I can now report that the Lord has opened my ministry opportunity! This work is something that has been in the process for about a year and at the beginning of March the doors opened! I’m pleased to announce that I will be serving alongside Pastor Mike Dente, and his wife Becky, at the Calvary Chapel church plant they began a few years ago in Paris, France. I hope to join their team in July or August 2009. I am recreating my newsletter and prayer cards, so be on the lookout for them in the next couple of weeks.

Thank you for your prayers and support during this time of transitioning.

The Lord’s blessing to each of you,

Lori