



Now What?

Your journey is not yet finished...

by Dusty Cooper



HERE WE GO

So, now you are home from your missionary journey, exhausted and excited, awkward and awed, with a whole new perspective on life, right? Maybe, like so many others, you came home with more questions than answers. In the days immediately following a missionary journey it is almost like we pass through some kind of depression, home but not really, wondering just what happened to us, what the journey means to my life at home, my future plans, and my priorities.

Don't let the "depressive" state scare you...it happens to almost everyone! Embrace this time of introspection or inspection of self, open your heart and mind to what God has to say to you, and know that, whatever happens next, God is who brought it into your life.

Too often, however, we come home still on an adrenaline rush, full of stories anyone not on the journey with us will not understand, and enter right back into the rat race we were in before our journey. How tragic it is when we go to all the effort to raise the financial support for the journey, go through all the pre-journey preparation/prayer, live as God's hands and feet in another culture for a short time, and then lose all that God showed us about Him, about others, and about ourselves.

The saying goes that "if you are not the lead dog, the view never changes". Before you went on your missionary journey your view was just the back end of the rat in front of you in the proverbial rat race of life. Now you have a chance to get out of that never-ending useless hurry of the world around you and examine just what path or race you want to join. This moment in time, this part of your life's faith journey is a perfect time to take stock of your life, your impact on others, your gifting by God for His service, and your priorities in life.

That is the bulls-eye of this study...Now What? You see, the journey is not over, just that short part of it that briefly took you into another place and culture. What you do with what you have experienced on your short-term missionary journey can and should last a lifetime! Let's continue the journey together for a while and see what's next...

MY JOURNEY AND MY GOD

Remember the time in the life of Christ, right after his resurrection from the tomb, when he walked along the road to Emmaus? He was accompanied by two men that were totally clueless just who their companion on the journey exactly was. They knew that something historical, spiritual, earth-shattering and life-changing had happened but had no idea what. We don't know how long this walk took but we do know these two human beings like you and I had no idea they were in the presence of God himself. It was only after Christ had left them that they realized they had been walking with the one who had the answers to all their questions and concerns about the future.

We can miss the presence of God in just such a real way ourselves! Romans 1 says this:

"Through him (Jesus) we received both the generous gift of his life and the urgent task of passing it on to others who receive it by entering into obedient trust in Jesus. You are who you are through this gift and call of Jesus Christ!" (verses 4-5)

Wow, this is huge stuff! We received the gift of life in Christ, eternal and abundant even now, and, at the same time, received his command to us to go to others. This is not what we do, verse 5 says, but who we ARE. This missionary journey we just finished is not about what we did while there but whom we are now that we have gone in obedient trust in Jesus to another culture to be his hands and feet. Missions is not about what we do but who we are – his friends, his hands and feet, the body of Christ, the Church.

So, who are you? Better yet, who are you in Christ? Scripture says that, if we are in Christ, we are his new creation, set in place by him to astound the world with his grace (II Corinthians 5:17). What just happened to you and the others on your missionary journey was no accident but a series of divine encounters that God set in place for your life before the worlds were ever framed for our existence.

Now what? Take a look at the following check-up. Consider it just like going to the doctor and getting your physical...not always pleasant but always extremely beneficial. Be honest in your answers; there is no bigger fool than the one that lies to himself! Let God speak to you through your check-up. Listen for his voice with great expectation of just what he has to show you about himself and about how he has gifted you for serving others.

CHECK-UP QUESTIONS	YOUR ANSWERS
Am I moving toward Christ today or away from him?	
What did I learn about God on my missionary journey?	
How do I apply that to my life?	
How do I apply that to my church?	
How do I apply that to the way I serve God daily?	
Which am I, a hearer that acts on the Bible or just a hearer? (James 1)	
NOW PRAY:	For the people you met on the journey abroad
	For the ministry you served while abroad
	For the team you joined on the journey
	For your heart's passion for worship, missions
	For any unreached people of the world
	For any missionary or national pastor

MY JOURNEY AND MYSELF

My wife and I have four children, two guys and two ladies, all grown now and blessed us with (to this point) seven beautiful grandbabies. One of our girls, Kristen, is the spitting image of Corinne, my wife, to the point that, most, when they see one or the other, know they belong to each other. Not only do they look alike, they act alike and it is absolutely amazing to me how much one reflects the other in both appearance and actions!

The Bible teaches us that we are to reflect Christ as we walk this earth he created. Romans 12:2 says we are to be transformed as Christ's followers, not conformed to this world. We are also told that we need to let the same spirit that was in Jesus be in us, guiding our actions and service to the Father. Jesus told us to be the light of the world, reflecting the Light of the world (Ephesians 5:8). Again he told us in John 15 that he is the vine and we are the branches, connected to him to the point that we are seen as one.

In recent years a famous basketball player, when someone referred to him as a role model to others, said he was not a role model because he didn't want to be. Truth is that was not a choice he could make – young people across the nation were looking up to him. He might not have been a positive role model but, good or bad that was definitely who he was (and is). Too many followers of Christ are the same way; we are reflections of Christianity, if not Christ himself, whether we want to be or not. People, once they know we are Christians, hold us to a different (and not always realistic) standard.

How are we reflecting Christ in our daily journey? Maybe it was easier to reflect Christ while overseas on your missionary journey than it is at home. That needs to change, don't you think? Careful now, we are not talking about putting on some false front so others will think you are something you are not. That is hypocrisy and there is already way too much of that in today's world. No, what we are talking about is being real, being the person God created us to be, gifted for service, connected to him, surrendered to follow him every day, everywhere. Your missionary journey should have showed you more about who you are in Christ, how you are gifted for service, and how he can use you just as you are.

Now what? Time for another check-up. We trust the last one was not so painful you run from this one! Be real in answering the following questions and let God continue to speak to you about the awesome things he has in store for you. Pray for those who touched your life on your missionary journey. Don't let what happened on your missionary journey fade away in your day-to-day.

CHECK-UP QUESTIONS	YOUR ANSWERS
Am I moving toward Christ today or away from him?	
What did I learn about myself on my missionary journey?	
How do I apply that to my life?	
How do I apply that to my church?	
How do I apply that to the way I serve God daily?	
How is my life reflecting God's spirit to others? (I Corinthians 6)	
NOW PRAY:	For the people you met on the journey abroad
	For the ministry you served while abroad
	For the team you joined on the journey
	For your heart's passion for worship, missions
	For any unreached people of the world
	For any missionary or national pastor

MY JOURNEY AND MY SERVICE

How do you think most followers of Christ (Christians) would answer this question: *"Do you really want to serve God with your life?"* Of course, just as you would answer "YES" to that we truly believe that most if not all Christians would as well! All of us **want** to serve God with our lives but how many of us follow through on that inward heart desire? Why do we fear serving God so much when his word clearly shows that we have all been created for service (Ephesians 2:10), gifted for service (Ephesians 4:7-16), and accompanied by God for service (Matthew 28:18-20)? What are we afraid of?

Our pastor friend in Cuba, when asked about how Christ's followers in that country serve God without ending up in jail for doing so, gave this answer: *"We are like the children of Israel in the wilderness. God gave them cloud by day and pillar of fire by night that they were to follow. When the cloud or fire rose up and moved, they followed; when it stopped, they did too, waiting for God to show them the next step. That is exactly how we live and serve God in Cuba...following God as he moves."* Wow, what a great way to live! If the followers of Christ in Cuba can do that under such oppression and government scrutiny don't you think we can do it with the freedoms we enjoy?

For a short period of time on your faith journey you have followed God to a foreign culture and country to serve him on your missionary journey. Why stop now? He led you to be a part of that team that served people you didn't know in a culture you didn't know (or maybe even understand). You followed the "cloud" or "fire" this far...what will you do when the cloud or fire moves again? Maybe it has already and you are in danger of not being in line with God's direction. That can, and should, change, right now, not wasting another irreplaceable moment of your life.

Not following the cloud or fire, the direction and presence of God, can lead to serious stuff for you and those God has sent you to serve. None of us want that, I know. So what now? What is the next step for you in following him? What did you have in your life that you followed to go on your missionary journey that you might have lost since? Serious stuff to think about as you complete another check-up of your life in the eyes of God and in the light of his word, the Bible.

CHECK-UP QUESTIONS	YOUR ANSWERS
Am I moving toward Christ today or away from him?	
How am I using currently the way I am wired for ministry?	
What did I have during and just following the journey that I have lost?	
How have I changed since leaving my field of service:	
How have I served God by serving others since leaving?	
Is my life today more about me or more about others?	
NOW PRAY:	For the people you met on the journey abroad
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	For the team you joined on the journey
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	For any unreached people of the world
	For any missionary or national pastor

MY JOURNEY AND MY RELATIONSHIPS

One of our mantras at IsleGO Missions is "it's all about relationships". Christianity is a relationship between God and his creation. God himself is a relationship, the Triune God, Father/Son/Spirit in one. The Bible is a book of relationships from God with Adam and Eve in Eden all the way through to the Lamb surrounded by the redeemed (us) in Revelation. So it is no surprise that our missionary journey is also all about relationships!

On your journey you worked alongside, played and worshipped with, and grew to love some truly awesome people. I often wonder what God's time with Adam and Eve looked like in the garden of Eden. Somehow I don't picture it as some kind of small group worship but more like long walks in paradise, enjoying both the beauty and bounty of creation, laughing together, and loving both the experience and each other. After all, this is why God created us, for his enjoyment and glory. The ancient creed tells us that we are to enjoy God as well.

Relationships are tough, though, both to start and even more so to maintain or grow. It is especially easy for a relationship to grow cold when we are distant from each other. When we don't spend time in conversation with God each day, our relationship with him grows cold. Long-distance relationships are tough here on earth as well with communication being key to a deepening union.

How will you maintain your relationship with those awesome people you served alongside on your missionary journey? How will you keep the relationship strong with those that served with you on your missions team? Neither connection will remain strong and definitely not grow if we aren't intentional about it. It is easy to get back into your old routine (read that, "rat race") and not stay connected to the great people that made up your team that went abroad to serve God by serving others. It is even easier, now that you are back in your own culture and home, to forget the friends you left behind in your country of service. If you don't determine to stay connected and devise a way to do so, it won't happen.

So, now what? Use the checklist below to be intentional about staying connected. Make this a weekly or even daily habit. Don't let time or busyness rob you of the joy of relationships!

CHECK-UP QUESTIONS	YOUR ANSWERS
Am I moving toward Christ today or away from him?	
What makes a relationship a healthy one?	
How do I keep relationships fresh?	
Why are relationships that important?	
What is the next step in my relationship with Christ?	
Where is God in my relationships with others?	
How have I cared for the relationships I made in the country I served?	
NOW PRAY:	For the people you met on the journey abroad
	For the ministry you served while abroad
	For the team you joined on the journey
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	For any unreached people of the world
	For any missionary or national pastor

MY JOURNEY AND GOD'S CLAIM ON MY LIFE

For the majority of people who go on a missionary journey it is both exciting and frightening at the same time. To see another culture up close, experience different foods/sights/smells/languages, is usually something that gets our adrenalin really flowing. The flip side of that coin is that, when God shows up on a missionary journey (and he always does), he can show us things about ourselves or speak to us about our lives that are scary and life-altering at the very least.

One of the things that almost always happens on such a journey is that we learn things about ourselves we didn't know before we left home. During our ministry projects God sometimes shows us how he wired us for ministry to others in ways we never thought possible. It happens in those moments when you are working on building someone's future or speaking Jesus into their life and you realize "I can **do** this!". Sometimes, in those quiet moments at night just before sleep comes or in the morning during your devos you clearly hear the voice of God telling you what he wants you to do with the blessings he has given you.

We have debated at IsleGO Missions over the years as to whether or not we need to put a disclaimer on our registration page: "WARNING! This missionary journey can and will change your life forever!". You will never be the same again afterwards. Now you know how God can use you for his glory and your good. Now you understand better why God made you the way he did and his purpose in doing so. You now have no excuses for not serving him by serving others every day, everywhere.

After all, we are his creation, made by him to serve him by being the hands and feet of God for others (read Ephesians 2:10). We are saved to serve – it is not an option but a fact that we must either accept and obey or ignore, hurting ourselves and those we were sent to serve. If God has truly planned your entire life, even before he created you, then he has in those plans specific people for you to touch in his name and specific purposes for your life in showing his glory. So, now what? What did God say to you?

CHECK-UP QUESTIONS	YOUR ANSWERS
Am I moving toward Christ today or away from him?	
What is God's claim on my life for missions?	
What role does missions now play in my life?	
What is the spiritual state of my city, my state, my school, my work?	
What needs exist in the above areas that I could help provide?	
What is my biggest fear about surrendering totally to God?	
Where do I draw the line on what I will or won't do for God?	
How much of myself have I truly given to God?	
NOW PRAY:	For the people you met on the journey abroad
	For the ministry you served while abroad
	For the team you joined on the journey
	For your heart's passion for worship, missions
	For any unreached people of the world
	For any missionary or national pastor

MY JOURNEY AND MY MINISTRY PARTNERS

Your vision of God's family is certainly much bigger now than it was before your missionary journey, isn't it! You had no idea the family of God, YOUR spiritual family, is as big and as diverse as it is, didn't you? So many races, languages, cultures, ways of worship, perceptions of God and his word – how awesome is our family through our Father God!

When you came home from your missionary journey you left behind some great people that continue building the kingdom of God in that location. It is their home and culture, the people that God has given them a vision to reach with his salvation and hope. You now know how difficult it can be for them, not just in doing ministry but even daily living in hard circumstances.

Just think how rich your life is now for knowing them, for being able to call them "friend", and for seeing how God is using them! You miss them already, don't you? Could it be that these great servants of God make up the "cloud of witnesses" spoken of by God in Hebrews 12:1? Believe me, you will never hear the name of their country mentioned again without seeing their face. Certain smells or sounds will immediately bring them to mind. Memories of your time together with them will continually flood your heart and soul in the days ahead.

But, is that enough? Can we reduce what happened during our missionary journey to some kind of post-card memory of great times with great people? Worse yet, could it be that, with time, we will go days, even weeks, without thinking of these new family members and friends? Unfortunately, it can happen and will happen if we don't purpose in our hearts to never forget. How tragic it would be to go through the experiences of your journey, to know and love people of God in a different land, and then come home to forget it all. So, now what? How do you plan to not forget your ministry partners?

CHECK-UP QUESTIONS	YOUR ANSWERS
Am I moving toward Christ today or away from him?	
How well did I connect with the host ministry on my journey?	
What did I learn from them?	
In what do we truly partner, why, and how?	
How can I be a more effective partner to the people of this ministry?	
When is my next journey? My next contact with my partners?	
How can I continue to be a blessing to them now that the journey is over?	
What kind of ministry partner am I truly to them?	
NOW PRAY:	For the people you met on the journey abroad
	For the ministry you served while abroad
	For the team you joined on the journey
	For your heart's passion for worship, missions
	For any unreached people of the world
	For any missionary or national pastor