

PREPARING YOUR DISCIPLES TO RETURN HOME

- Case Studies, Examples, Questions to Ask-

Zhang:

The past weeks had been hectic and stressful for Zhang. She had lost track of how many goodbyes, hugs and farewell gifts had been exchanged, tears had fallen and “remember the time when...? stories” had been shared. She would miss this place that had become her home over the past 5 years, where she had found a new family, a spiritual family in her church. Now she stood at the airport ready to begin her long trip home. Looking at the same two suitcases she had arrived with 5 years ago, it occurred to her how much had changed - the contents of her suitcases had changed; she had changed and grown in so many ways, intellectually, professionally, emotionally and spiritually. And now a new adventure lay ahead of her.

Zhang had come to faith in Christ her sophomore year and faithfully attended church and fellowship meetings. In addition, Zhang had grown as a leader as well and had facilitated a midweek prayer meeting. Now that she had found a great job and returned to China, she was excited to be home, be closer to family and hoped she could share her faith with them. The first weeks were glorious - eating the many foods she had missed while being overseas and shopping for clothes in sizes that fit her petite build. She enjoyed meeting old friends, but while they had been in touch via social media, she quickly realized that their life was busy and that they couldn't relate to her experiences overseas. Her parents encouraged her to make new friends. Well, they were hoping for a 'special' friend for her and even hinted at some eligible young men. Zhang missed her fellowship and looked for Christian friends. She found a church and started attending services. The services were long. No, really long. And the music was old fashioned. Hearing the scriptures and praying in Chinese felt foreign. It was hard to make friends at church. People seemed to be reserved and not very welcoming. On top of that, work was a bear. Zhang had expected to work long and hard hours, but 10-12 hours, 6 days a week? She felt she didn't have a life apart from work.

Her parents were concerned about Zhang's health and insisted she needed to rest as much as possible and that church was too long and a bother. Within 6 months, Zhang felt disillusioned, exhausted, and alone and eventually stopped going to church altogether - and her life became no different from those around her.

Discussion Question:

What are some of the factors that Zhang struggles with upon her return? What others would you add?

Ming:

Having come to faith in her junior year, Ming, like Zhang, was regularly involved in an international student fellowship and a local church and grew in her faith and leadership skills. Like Zhang, Ming accepted a job in China and soon found out that she was expected to work 10+ hours a day, including weekends. She tried to negotiate to have at least Sundays off but

was unsuccessful. Ming also found it difficult to make friends and get used to worship services at a Chinese church. She too felt exhausted and alone but not entirely taken by surprise. She pushed through, because prior to returning home, she had met with a Christian friend and together they had discussed the challenges she might encounter back home and how to respond to them. They continued to chat regularly, and Ming appreciated having a friend to talk to and pray with; someone who helped her pray about and discern how to share her faith and how to navigate the difficult situation at work.

In addition, she got connected with a group of Christian returnees who understood and supported each other. In time, Ming found a new job that paid less but had a more balanced schedule which allowed her to attend church regularly and even get involved in a Bible study.

Use the case studies in this video and discuss the reality of reverse culture shock.

Explore ways your returning friend has changed and what aspects of the host culture they have embraced or come to enjoy that are not part of their home culture.

Look at this example and discuss: *"Have you experienced feeling taken aback by something on a recent visit home? How have you changed?"*

They may have gotten used to simple habits such as being able to wear casual clothes instead of dressing up or come to appreciate small courtesies of everyday interactions as the comment of one returnee to East Asia illustrates: *"Everyone seems angry, and no one smiles or greets one another on the street; even if they bumped into you, there is no acknowledgment or apology."*

A good question to consider with your returning friend is: What do your parents expect in regards to marriage, choice of friends, lifestyle and work?

Ask your friend: What work challenges do you anticipate in your culture? What moral quandaries may arise?

As we study the word together, we can ask the question: "How would this be applied in your culture?"

As we train them skills like sharing the Gospel, leading a bible study, etc., we can ask: "What would be an appropriate way to do at home?"
