



Trekking Deeper

THE ABC OF PREPARATION



THE ABC'S OF PREPARATION

WEC TREK

WEC International

www.wectrek.org

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INTRODUCTION

- ♦ **Attitudes:** parts 1 – 4
- ♦ **The Basis of Mission:** parts 5 – 8
- ♦ **Cultural Issues:** parts 9–12

Preparing for your Trek assignment is very important. There are practical details such as having all the necessary vaccinations, getting hold of the appropriate equipment, and being able to shut all the zips once you have packed everything!

There are also more intangible aspects such as taking time to say goodbye to family and friends, making sure you have a number of people committed to praying for you while you are away, and preparing yourself for the challenges that lie ahead. These notes are designed to help with this last point.

Why not, right now, pray that the Lord will teach you and lead you as you prepare to go out and serve Him overseas?

This booklet is divided into three main sections, each with four parts. This is not a huge ‘tome’, so take your time to read and ruminate, and put aside the inclination to skim through!

Please note all Scripture references are from the New International Version.

My prayer for you is that you will have a fantastic Trek experience and that you will grow in your relationship with God and in your understanding of world mission.

Phil Grasham

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PARTS 1 – 4: **ATTITUDES**

In this first main section we are going to look at the subject of Attitudes.

Before we consider the Basis of Mission, and certainly before we explore several Cultural Issues, we need to lay a foundation on which to build these other topics.

As we go through, you need to be asking: What do I think about this? What do I feel about this?

Your attitudes are crucial, so it is worth spending time reflecting on these matters.



ATTITUDES: PART 1

FOUR FOUNDATIONAL FACETS

In this first part, we will consider four foundational facets: the Holy Spirit, prayer, God's love and God's Word. My aim is not to outline every shade and shadow of each point, but to make some observations with regard to your short-term mission trip. If you are thinking this all seems very basic, you should know that many Trekkers have gone overseas expecting their relationship with the Lord to take off and fly – after all, they were going out on a mission from God! However, they arrived in an unfamiliar culture with a language they couldn't speak, and encountered many opinions and behaviours they found to be bizarre. As a result, some of them took their eyes off Jesus and their relationship with God crash landed. Without a recognition of the importance of these spiritual elements, and without a commitment to pray and read God's Word, your relationship with the Lord might also dip and dive erratically.

You must go in the power of the Holy Spirit and minister with His wisdom and equipping (1 Corinthians 2:4-5; Ephesians 1:17). You will be involved in a spiritual ministry, even if you are going out to build a school or help with a sports project. Why? Because everything in life is spiritual! It is imperative that you are filled with, and open to, the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18; John 14:17). The Bible tells us that the Spirit testifies about the Son (John 15:26; 1 John 5:6), so without His work and intervention our witness is wasted. You are going as a minister of Christ proclaiming His message of life and truth. However, it is the work of the Spirit to convict people of sin and bring them to the point of commitment to Jesus (John 16:8; Titus 3:5-6).

Are you filled with God's Spirit? Do you keep in close contact with the Holy Spirit?

You need to be consistently praying both now and while you are on your Trek assignment (Ephesians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:17). Pray that God will prepare you as His channel of blessing and encouragement, and that He will reveal Himself through you, and the other members of your mission team, in everything that happens. Remember, the



ATTITUDES – PART 1

enemy will find it irresistible to try to frustrate the task of world evangelization, so pray for protection for yourself, your team, the local people and the message you will proclaim. As you scatter the seed of God's Word, pray that it will find receptive soil and not be snatched away by the devil (Mark 4:3-20). Once you have arrived at your Trek location it is vital, particularly in a Muslim context, to be seen to pray. Muslims believe Christians do not pray very often because they rarely, if ever, see them pray. You need to strike a balance between praying in secret (Matthew 6:6), and being seen as someone who orientates their life around God (Matthew 6:33; Colossians 4:2). People need to see that prayer is the foundation of your faith and essential in your life (John 15:7-8; Acts 1:14). Ask yourself: Is prayer really the foundation of my life (Mark 11:24)?

You need to go in God's love. You need to be ready to share His love with all the people with whom you will have contact (John 13:35; 1 John 4:7). You may be going to a people who are not the easiest among whom to live and work. They may be aggressive or aloof; dictatorial or deliberately difficult. However you find your people, it is important to realise that God loves them and so must you! People are people the world over; they will soon know if you like them and accept them or not. If you don't think you will like or accept them, you should ask yourself whether you really should be going. You need to recognise now, before you leave, that you go because you love God and want to see the unreached reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ (John 3:16-17; 1 John 4:10). You don't go because you will receive a warm welcome or because the people will be grateful! Do you accept, and are you secure in, God's love for yourself (Ephesians 1:4-6; 1 John 3:1)? Are you willing to share that love with others whatever they might say or do to you (Luke 6:32; 1 Peter 4:8)?

You need to be a man or woman of the Book (Psalm 1; Romans 15:4). If you haven't already, it is worth establishing a pattern of daily Bible reading now, that you will continue throughout your time abroad and, of course, thereafter! The Scriptures contain essential instructions for your present situation and future ministry but, more than that, the Spirit often uses God's word to counsel, comfort and correct (2 Timothy 3:16; 1 John 5:13). Reading the Bible will help you as you ponder your future assignment; it will help you with your perspectives and will shape you as you put God's words into practice



ATTITUDES – PART 1

(2 Timothy 2:15; James 1:22). It is good to be familiar with the Scriptures because you have no idea what questions you may be asked while overseas. You represent the Lord, and people will want to know what God thinks and says about various topics. Are you prepared to answer questions like: Why is the Bible full of contradictions? Did Jesus abolish the Law or not? How do you explain the Trinity? Why does God allow such poverty? Is my dead uncle now a ghost?

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ATTITUDES: PART 2

ARE YOU WILLING TO BE A LEARNER?

It is very easy to arrive at your Trek destination with misplaced attitudes and motivations. It is far more important to arrive with an attitude of humility and with a willingness to learn. Remember that the Lord is your teacher. As you pray and read the Scriptures, God can and will guide your thoughts and opinions. The Lord will never force you to think or do anything, so you must allow the Lord to challenge your perspectives, confront your worldview and generally make things a little uncomfortable. This is not so that you constantly struggle throughout your Trek or because God wants to make your time away as miserable as possible! The Lord does want to broaden your horizons, stretch your perceptions and teach you many new things about Himself, about others, and about yourself.

It is important to recognise that whoever comprises your mission team are also your teachers. It is not uncommon for short-term volunteers to get off the aeroplane and believe they know better than the mission workers who have lived and worked in that country for many years. You may quickly wonder why they do things that way and not this way. If they did “this” it would be quicker and easier. Think about that for a moment. Can you see how arrogant it is to assume that someone newly arrived has a better angle on local culture and local spirituality? There are probably very good reasons why the mission team do what they do and when they do it! Titus 3:1-2 says, “Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility towards all men.” Why not ask, sensitively, why things are as they are? It may be that even then you won’t understand why they do it that way. If so, you need to humbly accept that the mission workers know what they are doing. Let me be clear, I am not saying, “Don’t think about things, don’t ask questions, don’t get involved.” I am saying, “Don’t assume anything and don’t presume your background, churchmanship and Trek Orientation have prepared you for everything!” Colossians 3:12 says,



ATTITUDES – PART 2

“... as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” If you handle yourself this way you won’t go wrong!

The local people are your teachers, too. You might be heading for a Trek location where you will be involved in construction, evangelism, medicine or sport. Fantastic! Your expertise will be greatly used and no doubt you will make an enormous difference. Even so, when you arrive you need to learn about language and culture; you need to understand about their rhythm of life, their worldview and the ways they act, interact and react! To enter a culture believing your own is better is called ethnocentrism or, simply put, you may feel that your culture is civilised, the other is primitive, your culture is right and their culture is wrong! If you give your new culture a chance, you may find that you begin to appreciate that friendships are more important than achievements, community is preferable to individualism and that generosity is far less stressful than materialism! Once again, don’t misunderstand me. You are going out for a reason and you want to do the best you can. However, the better you know the people and their culture, the better you will be able to fulfil whatever ministry the Lord has prepared in advance for you to do (Ephesians 2:10).

Are you willing to be a learner?

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ATTITUDES: PART 3

ARE YOU WILLING TO BE A SERVANT?

In the last part, we considered learning from God, from the mission team and from the local people. We can say that being a servant falls into the same three categories and the principles are the same. You are going to serve! This is the bottom line – to be a helper and a servant. You may not have considered it in these terms but, essentially, this is what it's all about.

Throughout your time away, you need to live a life of servanthood towards God, your mission team and the local people. This can be hard if you are from an individualistic western nation that regards servants as second-rate, but Jesus beckons us to serve, help, give, and generally get our hands dirty for the sake of others. Our Lord who washed the disciple's feet – the job of a slave – calls us to take a towel and follow Him (John 13:5). Take a look at Isaiah 42. This shows us that the servant of God will act in tenderness, compassion and concern for the poor, the widow and the orphan; for the outcast and for those in need. We know that this is how Jesus lived and when He described greatness, He did so in terms of service, rather than power and prestige. Someone has written, "The reason that a servant is the most pre-eminent position in the kingdom of God is that the sole function of a servant is to give and giving is the essence of God."

It would be good while you are away to look for ways you can serve rather than waiting to be asked to do something. Service can come in different shapes and sizes; it does not have to be enormously sacrificial to be hugely significant. Are there errands to be run, cleaning to be done, people to be visited, objects to be mended, shopping to be bought or any of 1001 other acts of humble service to be performed?

It is also useful to recognise who and what you are. You are not more special than others because you are going on an overseas mission trip. You are not more devoted to God than your friends who are staying at home. In fact – my apologies if this bursts your bubble – God rarely chooses the biggest, brightest or the best! He chooses, according to



ATTITUDES – PART 3

1 Corinthians 1:27-29, the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; the weak things of the world to shame the strong; the lowly things of this world and the despised things to nullify the things that are. Why? So that no one may boast before Him.

A true servant has eyes to see what needs to be done and a heart that responds in love. A servant does “whatever” because servants serve, not because they are looking for applause or acclaim. In Luke 17:7-10 Jesus said, “Suppose one of you had a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’ ”

Finally, think how fantastic it will be at the end of your Trek to know that the Lord regards you as a good and faithful servant!

Are you willing to be a servant?

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ATTITUDES: PART 4

ARE YOU WILLING TO BE AN AMBASSADOR?

Before you leave on your overseas mission experience, it is good to realise that you are going as an ambassador of Jesus Christ. You are not a political or economic ambassador protecting the interests of your home country; you are an envoy from the King of the Universe sent to proclaim, share, bless and teach. The Lord of Glory has commissioned you with a task and you go to fulfil His mandate. It is important to give your mission trip the right context. It is not about travelling the world – although travel is involved; it is not about having an exotic holiday – although you will have a great time; it is not about simply doing something different – although it will certainly be that. It is about responding to God's call and the needs of the world. Stop there and ask yourself: "Why am I going on a Trek assignment? What are my motives? What are my objectives?"

As an ambassador of Christ, the way you conduct yourself and the way you treat other people takes on new meaning. After all, if people want to know about God they will look at His ambassadors, His representatives. In practice this means that you are not only the messenger of God's love and truth, you are actually the message of God's love and truth! You are a living, breathing, walking, talking example of God's grace, influence, mercy and faithfulness. If you are now thinking, "Wow, what a responsibility!" you would be absolutely right.

My dictionary defines an ambassador as "a diplomat of the highest rank, accredited as a representative to another country, usually for a specific length of time." Can you see how this fits perfectly with your role as an official of the gospel appointed as God's emissary to another country?

While an ambassador to a foreign nation should be treated with a certain amount of respect, it is worth noting that, as an ambassador of Jesus, you will not automatically command an audience. You represent the kingdom of love which means you may need to earn the right to share the gospel. This is important because in some countries



ATTITUDES – PART 4

it is not about taking any and every situation to speak about Christ, it is about discerning the right time and place, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, to share freely your faith and hope in the Lord Jesus.

Being an ambassador does not necessarily mean having an easy time. In Ephesians 6:19-20 the Apostle Paul wrote “Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.” Why does Paul write the word “fearlessly” twice in two sentences? Because for him, and maybe for you, the Lord had sent him to difficult and dangerous places. Note well that Christ’s ambassadors are often sent into draining and demanding situations.

One enormous difference between a political and a spiritual ambassador is that while the political ambassador leaves both the leaders that send him and his home country, you only leave your home country! Your spiritual leader, monarch, president, ruler will be with you wherever you go! The Lord has prepared the way ahead for you. He will go with you and, as you trust in Him, He will equip and empower you for everything you face in the months ahead.

Are you willing to be an ambassador of Christ?

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PARTS 5 – 8: THE BASIS OF MISSION

Now we have set the scene, and dealt with some fundamental starting points, we can begin to think about God's plan for this world. What is the basis of mission?

In Part 5 we will look at Mission in the Old Testament, and in Part 6 at Mission in the New Testament.

In Part 7 we will think about the Truth of Christ's Uniqueness in our pluralist and relativist world, and in Part 8 we will consider the Great Commission by breaking it into bite-sized pieces.



THE BASIS OF MISSION: PART 5

MISSION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

When people talk about mission they almost exclusively point at Jesus' words at the end of Matthew's gospel. This is what is known as the Great Commission. We have to ask ourselves: Is that it? Is that the only Scriptural verse that relates to mission?

It is good to stop a moment and reflect on the fact that the story of mission goes much further back than Christ and the Early Church. Some people say it goes back to Abraham, particularly to his call in Genesis 12 when God told him that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." In fact, I believe it goes back further than that – not to Abraham but to Adam! God's concern is not simply with the chosen race but with the human race.

When God created the world it was good. Adam and Eve's mission, found in Genesis 1:28, was to: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." Planet earth was to be populated with humanity who would rule over creation under the love and guidance of the one true God. We know that everything went disastrously wrong, so that even creation itself was infested with sin. But this is our starting point: God desires a world filled with people giving glory and honour to Him. From Eden, God's mission has been to draw out blessing from the world's bitterness and restoration from the world's rebellion. Do you have your Bible handy? Let's consider just a few of many mission-centred Old Testament verses:

1. Joshua 4:24 – God acted on behalf of the Israelites so that all the peoples of the earth might know that He is powerful.
 2. 1 Samuel 2:10 – the Lord will judge the ends of the earth.
 3. 1 Kings 8:59-60 – in Solomon's prayer of dedication he asks that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God.
 4. 41 Chronicles 16:23-26 – David proclaims that we should declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples.
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THE BASIS OF MISSION – PART 5

5. Psalm 2 – the psalmist begins by asking why the nations conspire against the Lord. But the Lord says, “Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.”
6. Isaiah 12:4-5 – this could be your mission statement: “Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted.”
7. Jeremiah 16:19 – in the end the nations will come to worship God.
8. Daniel 7:13-14 – these are awesome verses. The son of man is the glorious Messiah and all peoples, nations and men of every language worship Him.
9. Amos 9:12 – the Messiah will have a world-wide rule.
10. Zechariah 2:11 – in the end the nations will be joined with the Lord and He will live among them.

I have taken these ten points from ten different Old Testament books. It is not the case that one author touched on God's plan for this world while others weren't interested! This is a tiny selection: in the NIV Old Testament alone there are 493 verses and references to “nations”.

God's view has always been a planet full of people worshipping Him and loving one another.

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THE BASIS OF MISSION: PART 6

MISSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Now we have looked at a few verses in the Old Testament, we can turn our attention to the New Testament. Actually, it might be better to think of the Bible as separated into the Older and Newer Testaments. The Old Testament has not been devalued or replaced by the New Testament! The New Testament is a continuation and development of God's story. Anyway, with Christ's mission and the growth of the Early Church, we would expect to find verses that pick up on our mission theme. We are not disappointed. Once again, grab your Bible and we will look at just a few verses:

1. Matthew 24:14 – the end will come only after the gospel has been preached in the whole world.
2. Mark 11:17 – God is concerned that we pray for the nations and not just for our own locality.
3. John 3:16-17 – God so loved the world that He gave His Son to save the world.
4. Acts 1:8 – we are to be witnesses to the ends of the earth.
5. Romans 16:26 – Christ has been made known so that all nations might believe and obey Him.
6. Ephesians 1:9-10 – God's plan is to bring everything in heaven and on earth together under Christ.
7. Philippians 2:10-11 – God exalted Jesus and one day every tongue on earth will confess Jesus Christ is Lord.
8. 1 Timothy 2:4-6 – God wants all men – everywhere – to be saved.
9. 1 John 2:2 – Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for the whole world.
10. Revelation 5:9 – because of Christ's death, He has purchased men for God from every people and nation.

Notice, again, that I have taken verses from ten different books. There are so many others that we could have considered, so these are really just a sample selection. The important thing is to realise that the concept of mission is not constructed from a couple of verses



THE BASIS OF MISSION – PART 6

in one gospel. As we open our Bibles, we see that the principle and practices of mission are everywhere! God was not rambling or wordy when He inspired the Scriptures. We don't have twenty-four volumes but one compact book. If the Lord spent so much time focussing on and talking about the nations, it must be important to Him. It is a simple truth that what is important to Him should be important to us!

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THE BASIS OF MISSION: PART 7

THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS CHRIST

We need to consider a truth that is under attack in our pluralist and relativist world – Jesus Christ is unique. As evangelical Christians, we believe there is only one Saviour and there is only one gospel. In other words, the Lord Jesus is exceptional: only Jesus is both God and man; only He could have, and only He has, reconciled heaven and earth and restored the relationship between God and humanity. In every other religion we find human attempts to reach out to find the divine – to do enough good things to be accepted and to refrain from enough bad things not to be punished. Only in Christianity do we find God making all the moves and opening up the way for sinful humanity to turn and run back to Him.

In today's world, some say that there is salvation in every religion and ideology, but an important question to ask is: What does it mean to be saved? CE Braaten states that there is salvation in every religion, and even in secular ideologies, if we define salvation in terms of humanisation, development and freedom. However, if we define salvation as a promise that God offers to the world with regard to justice, peace and righteousness, then humanity needs a Saviour. There is only one mediator between God and humanity – the Lord Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5); there is no other name by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Stop a moment and ask yourself how you would answer the following two questions? Why was and is Jesus so special? What did Jesus say about Himself?

Jesus is special because:

- ♦ the Old Testament foretold Jesus' arrival on earth centuries before His birth (Micah 5:2)
 - ♦ He was not conceived naturally, but through the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18)
 - ♦ Jesus lived a perfect and sinless life (Hebrews 4:15)
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THE BASIS OF MISSION – PART 7

- ♦ He performed incredible signs and wonders revealing His power and authority (Mark 6:41)
- ♦ He was raised from the dead (Luke 24:39)
- ♦ He ascended into heaven to take His rightful place beside the Father (Acts 1:9)
- ♦ Jesus continues to live and will never die (Hebrew 7:3)
- ♦ Jesus is coming back and will decide the destination of every person (2 Timothy 4:1).

Jesus made extraordinary claims about Himself:

- ♦ He said that He existed before the creation of the world (John 17:5)
- ♦ He claimed, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30)
- ♦ He said that people would be judged according to their response to Him (John 3:18)
- ♦ He said He came to give His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28)
- ♦ He claimed His authority underlined His divine status (John 8:28)
- ♦ He asked the Father to glorify Him (John 17:1)
- ♦ He said that He would return (Mark 14:62)
- ♦ He said, “I am the way ... No-one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it shows that the uniqueness of Christ is not so much a claim that is made about Jesus, as it is the claim of Christ Jesus Himself.

Jesus is not simply a man who lived on earth around two thousand years ago. Christ reveals the Father and fulfils the Father’s will. Christ needs to be seen in His divine fullness (Colossians 2:9), so that salvation is offered from the King of kings and is part of the redemptive purposes of God and involves all people and the whole of creation. In brief, Jesus Christ is uniquely unique!



THE BASIS OF MISSION – PART 7

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THE BASIS OF MISSION: PART 8

THE GREAT COMMISSION

As we have seen, we find the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. However, we should note that neither Jesus nor the apostles called it that. We have seen that the Bible has so much more to say about mission than these three verses, but it is still worth examining Jesus' last words before He ascended into heaven. It would be good to have this passage open in front of you. With the space available, let's consider just six points:

1. Verse 18 – Christ has all the authority and all the power. You can accomplish everything He asks you to do because He is in control. Jesus has all the authority because He is the King in the kingdom of God. By His death and resurrection, Jesus defeated all His enemies and secured completely all authority. (See Philippians 2:8-9 and Romans 8:31).
 2. Verse 19 – there is one command in this verse and it's not "go"! Jesus commands us to "make disciples". What Jesus actually said is, "While you are going" or "As you are going" make disciples. The point is that He expected the disciples to go and, wherever they went, they were to make disciples who would make more disciples.
 3. Verse 19 – you may know that the word "disciple" means "learner" or "follower". Jesus' command is not to make converts who will sit around waiting for heaven, but to make disciples who will surrender everything to Him and who will trust and obey Him all the days of their lives ... as well as looking forward to heaven! (See Luke 11:28; Romans 15:13).
 4. Verse 19 – our Bibles use the word "nations" which gives us the idea of geographical regions. The original Greek means "ethnic groups". This is important because the Lord wants us to reach every ethnic group, not just some people from every country. Take Papua New Guinea, for example. It is one nation but has over 800 ethnic groups. And God is interested in them all.
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THE BASIS OF MISSION – PART 8

5. Verse 20 – Christ instructs you to teach new disciples to obey everything He has commanded. This is significant because Jesus' message of hope and truth shows us the best way to live. Christ is not looking for a half-hearted commitment but wholehearted obedience both from you and from those to whom you go. (See Matthew 19:17, 22:37-39).
6. Verse 20 – this verse gives us the precious promise that wherever we are, Jesus is with us. You can be certain that God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – will not be any less present, less real, on your Trek assignment than He is in your home church. God's omnipresence means that we cannot escape Him! Jesus gives you His presence so that you may accomplish the work He has given you to do. (See Hebrews 13:5-6 and Psalm 139).

You have been commissioned by the King of Heaven and Earth to make disciples, teaching them to obey everything Christ commanded; and you can be confident that He will be with you wherever you go.

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PARTS 9 – 12: CULTURAL ISSUES

In this final major section, we will look at a few cultural issues. In Revelation 7:9 we read: “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”

How did John know they were from every tribe and language and people and nation? What do you think? Commentators believe that he must have seen and heard the many cultural and linguistic differences. There were people worshipping in a multitude of different ways shaped by their own culture and worldview. They may all have been dressed alike, but John looked and saw the enormous variety and diversity of people.

We should state right at the start that God delights in cultures. All the many and varied ways in which people “live and move and have their being” (Acts 17:28) are not a consequence of Adam and Eve’s sin. As we look at the world, there is much that we can rejoice in while still recognising that every culture needs to be transformed by the Lord Jesus Christ.



CULTURAL ISSUES: PART 9

WHAT IS CULTURE?

It is likely that you are heading for a very different culture from your own. This means a different language, a different set of values, and a different view of the world. It is important to note that your assignment culture will be different – not weird, not wicked, and not wrong.

Culture is all of the non-biological, non-environmental things in which human beings are involved. So, whereas biology tells us we need to eat and sleep, a culture determines what to eat and where, when and on what to sleep. Also, although the local flora and fauna are themselves not culture, culture does direct how people interact with nature – the way it regards the plants and animals around it.

We can also note five characteristics of culture: first, culture is learnt. Cultural traits are not genetic. People are born cultureless and then learn culture from birth, from those who raise them. For example, in western cultures we learn to shake hands when we greet someone. In other cultures, people learn to greet each other by rubbing noses, bowing respectfully, or spitting on each other's chests.

Secondly, culture is a way of life. Although it is taught, people are largely unaware of being trained. This is because people learn by observation, imitation and experimentation. People adopt a particular set of habitual patterns of understanding and behaving. For example, a German child brought up by a Chinese couple in Beijing would learn to eat with chopsticks but a Chinese child brought up by a German couple in Berlin would learn to eat with a knife and fork.

Thirdly, culture is shared by a social group. If only one person thinks or acts in a certain way that thought or action represents a personal habit, not a pattern of culture. To be human means to be part of a culture. An Indian person shares certain values, beliefs and behaviour patterns with other Indian people. This gives him or her a sense of connection and relationship with that group.



CULTURAL ISSUES – PART 9

Fourthly, culture is ordered. A foreign culture may appear chaotic to outsiders but it is, in fact, ordered around a central worldview. The various strange customs you might observe relate to this hidden inner view of the world. You might believe that a people's culture is strange, if not incomprehensible, but to the local people their culture makes sense.

Finally, culture constantly changes. Cultures adapt and evolve to meet the group preferences. The elements which survive are those which contribute to the benefit of the group. The pressures to change are many and everywhere; some influences are positive and some are not: migration, unification, urbanisation, education, globalisation, mass media, etc. Which do you think are positive and which are negative?

Try to discover as much as you can about the local people on your Trek assignment both before you leave your home country and while you are overseas.

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CULTURAL ISSUES: PART 10

WHAT ARE ENCULTURATION AND ACCULTURATION?

Enculturation is the process by which every individual learns to survive and cope with his or her environment, beginning at birth and continuing until death. It is the development of how individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable them to become fully functioning members of their societies. It is a conditioning process whereby a person, as a child and later as an adult, achieves competence and expertise in his culture.

Acculturation is the process by which an outsider to a culture comes in and slowly adapts to the new culture. This is necessary every time someone crosses from one cultural context to another.

There are several stages in acculturation. To start with, there is excitement. It is difficult to leave family and friends behind, but usually the level of expectation is high and there are feelings of eagerness and anticipation.

You will have mixed emotions. Alongside the feelings of enthusiasm come feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. One of the first things people realise is how dependent they are on others. You may soon discover that you cannot communicate freely. You will need to learn the local language but until then you will need the help of other people. You will find that you do not know how to complete the basic tasks of daily life such as taking public transport, going shopping and dealing with strangers. What was usually automatic and obvious becomes abnormal and obscure. This can be hard for individualistic westerners! Confusion may come from unexpected sides: not being able to recognise people while they know and recognise you!

You will discover definite changes based on a different worldview. You will note that some outward things are unusual, but more so are the underlying cultural assumptions. You will probably discover that your usual cultural guidelines do not apply, so you may feel you have no cultural guidelines at all! You realise that you are in a foreign culture and that local people will not adapt to you, you must adapt



CULTURAL ISSUES – PART 10

to them. You will need to learn to live with the feeling that you only understand a fraction of the things going on around you; otherwise you will easily slip into ethnocentrism. You might even find that you must learn what a “friend” is!

Adaptation happens as the pieces slowly start to come together and you begin to feel more comfortable with your surroundings. You may even begin to feel at home!

This process can be what you make it: you can either fight for your cultural identity, and therefore struggle to adjust to your new location, or you can view it as an adventure of discovery and thus adapt more easily to your new home.

People differ and different people will take shorter or longer times to progress through these stages. It will be harder for some and easier for others with different things causing major or minor strain. This is where right attitudes and a close walk with the Lord are essential.

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CULTURAL ISSUES: PART 11

WHAT IS CULTURE SHOCK?

When we encounter the difficulties outlined in Part 10 it is usually described as culture shock. There are various symptoms of culture shock which include home-sickness, tiredness, irritation, withdrawal into self, socialising only within the mission community, excessive eating, rejecting the local people, excessive bathing, day dreaming, excessive reading, and a critical attitude towards oneself, the mission agency, other workers, nationals and even God – because He sent you there!

The first step in combating culture shock is to recognise that you have it! Once you understand that your emotions are bouncing about for a reason, it is easier to calm them down. Next, take time to pray and keep on praying. You need to be truthful with God about how you are feeling. The Lord knows you better than you know yourself, so communicate honestly with Him and allow Him to give you His peace. Forgive those who hurt or offend you, make friends in the new culture, serve others, maintain a healthy regime of eating and sleeping, find someone to talk with about your struggles and take steps to reduce any causes of tension. Finally, but very importantly, laugh at your mistakes!

Here are a few practical things that can help with acculturation and culture shock, although not all of these will be appropriate for every Trekker in every Trek location. In many societies a lot of time is taken over greetings and farewells; it is important to stop and talk to people when they come to see you. You may find the left hand is reserved for anything unclean and is kept out of sight while eating. In some cultures, it can be very impolite to refuse when you are offered something, so it will be necessary to find out culturally appropriate ways to deal with this, and it is vital to discover who gifts are given to and how. It is important to understand male-female relationships, such as appropriate behaviour in talking to or touching members of the opposite sex in public. Be aware that in most cultures time is flexible and many cultures do not have the concept of being late. In



CULTURAL ISSUES – PART 11

some cultures it is considered dangerous to compliment children on their gender or appearance as it is thought to attract the attention of evil spirits. Remember, if you want to take photos of people it is polite to ask permission beforehand! Be especially careful about photographing women – particularly in Muslim countries – and children.

It is fundamental to avoid discriminatory attitudes. Make sure you steer clear of national caricatures or stereotypes. It is said that all Australians are crude and simple, all Americans are loud and aggressive and all English are reserved and proud. Not only is this untrue and unhealthy, but if we think of other people like this how can we ever relate to them properly?

Stay away from making unfavourable comparisons with your own nation, even when invited to do so. The glories and excellence of your own country are not part of the gospel! We all stand as equals before the throne of grace.

Finally, it is important to avoid a merely professional interest in people, which gives the impression that you are only interested in them to get them converted, or while they fit into a programme in which you are involved. Your assignment is primarily about relationships with mission personnel and local people.

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CULTURAL ISSUES: PART 12

WHAT IS INCARNATIONAL MINISTRY?

There are a lot of discussions in missiological circles concerning the concept of Incarnational Ministry. This is right and good as mission workers should seek to remove as many of their own cultural barriers as possible, so as not to stand in the way of the truth of Jesus Christ. Slowly read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. This is incarnational ministry!

Are you prepared to become all things to all men so that by all possible means you might save some?

There are two levels of identification. There is what we might call surface levels of identification, such as learning to eat the local food, living in local housing and wearing local clothes. These can be important, but it is far more important to identify with people at a deeper or heart level: for example, learning to use the language like the local people, learning to look at the world like the local people and even learning to think like the local people.

It will be crucial to follow the example of the long-term mission workers you will be staying with. They have chosen a particular level of incarnational ministry for a number of reasons. As the “new kid on the block” it is not for you to be either overwhelmed by their simple lifestyle or judgemental of their way of behaving. By all means ask questions but, if you are tempted to think they could do more, humbly recognise that just about everyone can cope with anything for a few months and your hosts may have been overseas for many years.

There are three models of incarnational ministry:

1. Total adoption of the lifestyle of the local people. Most people regard it as unachievable and unrealistic to become entirely acculturated to a local culture. If mission workers claim that they are one with the people, the local community will suspect their motives, because they know the mission workers are not what they appear to be.
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CULTURAL ISSUES – PART 12

2. Adopting the local lifestyle in certain areas. The problem can be that by identifying halfway, the mission worker can live a schizophrenic lifestyle; he or she has a split identity with a foot in two different cultures. The missiologist Jacob Loewen states that there are numerous limitations to this model. These include that after a certain length of time the people will expect us to act in a culturally appropriate way, and will assume that we know more of their language and culture than we actually do. By claiming to identify with them when we are only doing so in some areas can give the impression of being dishonest.
3. Adopting an empathetic lifestyle. Over time the mission worker makes solid relationships with the local people. Honesty and integrity are vital as both sides get to know each other in a variety of different contexts. Through these relationships the mission worker learns both the local language and the local culture. He or she comes to understand the people and how they view the world around them. As these cross-cultural friendships are formed, the opportunities naturally arise to talk about life and faith.

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ONE FINAL THOUGHT

So there we go! This has been a very quick look at some major issues. Spend some time thinking back over what you have learnt; be ready to discuss these topics as you continue to prepare to go overseas and, in everything, commit yourself to the Lord.

One final thought: if you are now feeling rather overwhelmed, remember that, throughout your Trek assignment, it's not about you, it's about Jesus; it's not about what you can do, it's about what He can do!

Trekking Deeper is a devotional discipleship programme specifically written for short-term volunteers. The aim of the Course is to help "Trekkers" keep their focus on Christ and to grow spiritually during their placements.



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"I learnt things that I could apply and think about and they weren't boring!" **Alison Davey (Sierra Leone)**