

## How you can support young people living internationally

(from a survey of 21 Christians who lived internationally in their 20s-30s)

For supporters back home:

### 1. Check in regularly (said by 8)

- Don't just wait for people to reach out, set up touch points for people to get care if they need it. Offer support resources, both practical and your presence.
- Stay in touch! Those little messages or letters or gifts mean the world to people living far away. It shows them they are not forgotten and often they come at just the right, ordained time to lift spirits that are low.
- It can be very lonely and discouraging being alone in another country or even with a team. Emails, video calls, asking how they genuinely are doing, praying and letting them know you're praying are all important.
- Show them you care by contacting them weekly; rarely does it have to be a phone call. Remind your internal communication methods about your young people living internationally. Send them packages regularly, no matter how small.
- Ask them what level of communication is sustainable for them. They probably already have more than they can handle as they live and work in a new culture.
- Visit once in a while.

### 2. Listen well (4)

- Yes, share about life at home, but also try to put yourself in their shoes and ask intentional questions. Remembering their responses and context shows genuine care. I can't tell you how many times people have asked me how it's going in some other country I've never been to because they can't even remember where I am. A meaningful, specific question is much more encouraging.
- Don't offer unsolicited advice if you don't really understand the culture or context they work in. Just listen and show empathy. I can't tell you how many times I've shared frustrations with people back home only to be met with trite "advice" instead of just a listening ear. Or even worse, judgments on the culture with absolutely zero idea what they're talking about.
- When they're visiting your church, give them more than a "missions minute" to talk about their experiences.

### 3. Pray (1)

- Your regular prayers are the most powerful, influential thing in their lives whether they know it or not. The battle is unseen and they need protection and strengthening! It also brings you into the journey with them rather than feeling like you are unengaged and far away.

For people on the ground:

### 1. Offer friendship if you're on the ground (6)

- Be the stand-in family (churches especially). Host Easter lunch. Go hang out with the person in the hospital. Be the "cousins/aunts/uncles" etc relationally that the young people are missing. It's lonely only having friends overseas but not family. Make a family.

- Make sure they are in a local church with deep friendships.
- Share your own international experiences with them.
- Provide places for them to hang out and connect because it's often hard to connect with locals.
- Make sure they aren't alone on holidays or birthdays.

## 2. Help them settle in (2)

- Emotional and psychological support is essential, but there should also be significant practical support. Help them arrange housing, set up a bank account, get a transit card, etc.
- Help them to get acquainted with the people, place, culture, so that they'll have a chance to love it too. Provide a support system for them including a few intentional friends, a counselor, a healthcare worker, etc.

## For organizations:

### 1. Provide safe spaces (4)

- Help people feel safe to not be "okay" and to be able to process that with others if needed, either locally or from a distance.
- Provide time and space for feedback.
- Help people learn to say no and set boundaries. Provide a space where they can breathe outside of their "work".
- A clear reporting structure or support network is important. It is easy for faith-based organizations to spiritually manipulate their young (often single, often female) employees into giving everything 24/7. This isn't really healthy, necessary, or biblical. Having someone on the ground, rather than reporting remotely is also helpful. And examining company culture to determine if the goals are realistic and manageable.
- If possible, provide ongoing counseling.

### 2. Support them financially (2)

- Support from a sending church would have been amazing. We were "launched" from a new church plant, and were totally forgotten.
- Not having to stress about finances is a gift and often allows you to be a part of an answered prayer.
- Build big budgets that help fairly compensate a missionary, including with travel/vacation budget lines. The adage "you get what you pay for" is true in missionary budgets. Missionaries with big budgets stay on the field for decades. Help young people meet those fundraising goals. Finally, just because they are 20 or 30 doesn't mean they should be seen as a bargain or they won't need a lot of money.

### 3. Balance flexibility and freedom with accountability (2)

# Top 12 Pieces of Advice If You Want to Live Internationally

(from a survey of 21 Christians who lived internationally in their 20s-30s)

## 1. Build an intentional support system (said by 7)

- (...before you go if possible). It's important for longevity.
- I had a prayer team that met every month. They were the group of people I could share anything with and it was helpful to process with them too.
- If you've never lived in the country before and don't have a solid foundation of community and network there, only go if you are employed and will be supported by your organization.
- Have a sending church who actually cares about you.
- Call your family every week.

## 2. Learn the language and culture (7)

- Do research on where you want to go, have an open mind and heart, learn the language as early as you can (actually learn it, not just please, thank you, and hello!)
- A few tips:
  - Not good at language learning? Find a local university and have cheap meals in the cafeteria to try and talk with students.
  - Try every dish on the menu at least once.
  - Attempt every form of local transportation that you can.
  - Keep a written or digital list of all your new words, foods, and locations for future reference.
  - Create a private online map with all your favorite pinned places and restaurants.
  - Start a focused blog about your host country / language.

## 3. Count the cost; have realistic expectations and motives (5)

- Be intentional – know your why. Low expectations are EXTREMELY helpful.
- International living can be a wonderful, beautiful adventure but it is not easy or without cost-physically, emotionally, and relationally. Know the cost and are you willing to pay it. You will likely be stretched and challenged to the deepest parts of you. You will be challenged when everything around is so different and you don't understand why. You will miss out on a lot when you leave the US but what you gain is so much more.
  - One analogy I have recently used for myself to help process moving internationally is that it's a bit like being placed in a ball game, told to play but you have no idea of any of the rules. And most of the rules you think are rules don't work. It can be disorienting and confusing. Be an observer and learn. Expect to make mistakes and learn from them. It will take time and you'll never be an expert but you will adapt.
- Living in another country is not a solution to any problems you may have and does not make life easier. Life is almost certainly much, much harder simply because it's foreign. Move abroad because you are passionate about the work you'll be doing and passionate about learning about another culture and understand there will be very hard and lonely times.
- If it's adventure you seek, you'll give up when consistency is required. If it's meaningful relationships, you'll find it hard when you're alone. If it's being needed, you'll feel disillusioned when you live off the generosity of locals and don't have words or culture to give back. Go because God is worth it. He has put you in this place for this time and is using it to reveal

himself, not only to the locals but also to you! God loves you as much as the people you are serving, but on the other hand, never lose sight of the incredible need of a lost and dying world. Stay outward-focused and God's love will strengthen you to press on when you didn't think it was possible!

#### 4. Be present and invest locally (5)

- Technology is a blessing but can also be a big distraction so be mindful of how much time you spend connecting with people back home.
- Don't be afraid to take a step back from even close friendships in your home country. The friendships worth maintaining at home will be there when you come back. Be present in your overseas life, don't keep one foot back in your home country."
- Be willing to give up things in order to gain relationships with the locals.
- Be willing to initiate again and again. The goodbyes do not get easier.
- Slow down, find your people, and make it official.

#### 5. Let God guide you (4)

- Follow God first and always. There are always different opinions out there about how you should live.
- Pray, seek wisdom and counsel about your field - what do local relationships look like, how and where will you spend your time, etc.
- Get in the word. Rely on the Holy Spirit for everything.

#### 6. Go if God is calling you (4)

- It's worth it to wait for the right timing and not rush and force something to happen, but at the same time be persistent in seeking to obey God because there is still real work and sacrifice.
- If you are feeling a nudge on your heart to go, take steps in that direction. God will show you the way. We never know the grace that awaits us for our tomorrows so don't let your fears stand in the way.
- I think it is totally worth it, but there is a trade-off, usually financially or security-wise in terms of the normal benefits and systems in place at a typical job.

#### 7. Be humble (3)

- You are a guest and a learner first, not someone there to teach the locals how it's done.
- Don't try to be an American savior! You aren't a savior to anyone.
- Recognize that your behaviors, beliefs, etc are a result of your culture and respect that you are entering another culture you need to honor.

#### 8. An attitude of flexibility is EXTREMELY helpful. (3)

#### 9. Boundaries (3)

- Be careful. Don't be naïve. Everybody is not your friend.
- Learn to say no, prioritize self-care, and don't be afraid to report unhealthy/manipulative/toxic workplace behaviors, including from leadership. If you're facing challenges, chances are others are too. And even if they're not, it's important to resolve issues and blow the whistle rather than waiting for three years like I did.

- I needed better boundaries and to stick up for myself. I wanted to be a team player, but my boss was going to take as much as I would give the program. I was worried that I was replaceable, and if I made too much bother they would find someone else, and I really loved the job. But I think better communication would have helped my boss realize how much work I was doing, and then have been more receptive to pushback or boundaries.

#### 10. Be cautious in romance (2)

- Don't go with the expectation of finding a spouse or romantic relationship.
- Don't get married without a local home church or actual professional pre-marital counseling.

#### 11. Work at team dynamics (2)

- Team was one of the major decision-making factors in coming to my location.
- Often we have expectations we don't realize of internationals because we assume their culture or experiences are more similar to ours, while we are pretty gracious to the locals we come to serve. That comes out in disappointment and conflict between team members. The hardest part has been working on a team, but it has also been the most necessary and life-giving.

#### 12. Have fun! (1)

- Buy a really good backpack. Leave your host country often, whether vacation to another country or visit back home. Every day living internationally can be an adventure... enjoy it!