

Charting Your Journey to the Nations:

Ten Steps to Help Get You There

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The key reason for developing "perspective" as a World Christian is to see the world as God sees it. But a razor-sharp biblical perspective is not a static thing you possess. You really cannot just stand at this high vantage point as a spectator, watching what God is doing around the world. To see what God sees, and to value what God values is no small thing. This kind of vision is so compelling and inviting, perhaps the most dangerous response is to do nothing. Such a vision of God's mission virtually thrusts you into the middle of all that He is doing throughout the world and all through history.

Some of you will be "goers," seeking to move out as soon as you can into a more active role in global mission. And some of you will be "growers," men and women committed to serving and supporting others who move to the frontiers. But, whatever role God opens for you, there are some action steps to consider.

The following ten steps are arranged in a logical, but not necessarily fixed sequence intended to help you chart your journey to active engagement with the peoples of the world. It's a pathway primarily for those who will be "goers." Of what use is the following list for those who are gifted to serve instead as a "grower?" Understand this process all the more! You will be called upon for the rest of your life to help launch many others who will serve as front-line missionaries.

Within each major phase are several smaller steps. The exact sequence of the steps is not the critical issue. Pursue them in any order, but be sure you keep them all before you. You'll notice that some of them are not steps that you accomplish and then stop doing. They are really courses of growth and obedience that you will want to continue pursuing throughout your life. The point is to step into a path of obedience as if it were a prolonged journey. You've no doubt already begun. Don't hesitate to act boldly to fulfill the vision God is giving you. Take purposeful steps from this day forward!

PHASE ONE: Getting Ready—Stretching

1. Personal Spiritual Formation:

Who you are—your character and spiritual formation as a disciple of Jesus Christ—are essential to the role you will play in missions. Clarifying your basic commitment, your spiritual gifts, your call, and making sure your spiritual

foundation is solid are necessary first steps to ensure an effective journey. Finding a personal mentor early on in this journey is foundational to your long-term effectiveness.

2. Body Boost—Getting On-the-Job Experience in Your Home Church:

Understanding your church's unique vision, how the church functions for missions, and finding your place and gifted role in it is critical to your ultimate effectiveness in extending the church into other cultures. Making disciples in your home culture will hone your ministry skills and help sharpen your spiritual giftedness before serving in a cross-cultural setting. Investing in the supporting of missionaries will better equip you for the day when you may be on support. Again, seeking out and submitting yourself to fruitful senior saints in your local church as mentors or "spiritual directors" will encourage you along the ministry path. Ask God to give you such a relationship with older and wiser people.

3. Exposure to Other Cultures:

Growing up in only one culture limits our ability to understand others, appreciate diversity, and learn other languages. Frankly, being mono-cultural is really boring for today's global citizen in a pluralistic society. So gaining some early cross-cultural exposure, either locally or globally, stretches our mental, physical and spiritual muscles, and helps us to understand and accept people in other cultures. Hundreds of churches and agencies offer one or two-week exposure trips, up to three-six month short-term ministry experiences. Be choosy. The best short terms are not a substitute for the critical need for long-term missionaries. Study in another country is another useful way to earn academic credit while broadening your world view. It's also an invaluable crucible for testing your gifts, your passions, your dreams, and your capacity to go longer term.

4. Basic Education:

Academic preparation for a short or long-term ministry needs to be customized to your experience, skills and gifts. What steps can you take at this point that will broaden your worldview and enrich your basic educational

background? Not everyone has to have university degrees to be used by God, but don't cut your formal schooling short just because you suspect God is running out of time!

Check out the possibility of studying abroad, especially in restricted access areas, where only visiting students or language learners are granted visas. This way, schooling doesn't interrupt education but actually completes it. Pursue a mentoring relationship with those who have gone ahead of you.

PHASE TWO: Getting There—Linking

5. Church or Agency Contact and Candidacy:

What sending group or "team" is the best "fit" for you as the vehicle for service? Your best work is not a solo effort. It's not really about a career choice for your fulfillment as it is about bearing much fruit. Get grafted into a living, fruitbearing organism of church life, be it a church or a church supporting your efforts in league with a mission agency. What kind of team do you need to make you most effective and to help you grow the most? What kind of team leadership do you need to keep you focused and effective? Many of the strongest teams are intergenerational and international.

What are the options? There are thousands of strong churches and over 700 mission sending agencies with a wide span of cross-cultural ministry interests. They range in size from those with thousands of missionaries to those with just a handful. Begin with input from your home church. Continue with the agency you know best. Check out their theology, model of ministry, vision and leadership. Talk with several until you find a few with whom you are compatible on the major issues.

Some agencies are deeply involved in church planting, while others serve the existing church. Some target specific peoples groups, such as Muslims or Native American peoples. Many have broad, holistic ministries—from relief and development to theological education. Check out the key source of agency information—the most recent edition of *The MARC Mission Handbook-North American Protestant Ministries Overseas*.

The initiative lies with you. Remember, God has a distinctive purpose for your life which involves providing His guidance to take you exactly where He wants you to be. That place is worth seeking in faith.

6. Assignment Search:

Related to the question of the mission sending groups is the question of location, people group, and specific role on a church planting team that God is asking you to fulfill in reaching others with the Gospel. Who are they? Where are they? How can your gifts be used to reach them or to build up the national church?

A word of caution here about searching and exploring. Searching does not mean “picking out what I’d like to do.” In fact, some of the best assignments are often those given by mature and discerning senior leaders. Initial or early assignments are usually the times in which one proves out who they really are and can move onward from there to subsequent phases of ministry of the highest significance. The reality is that almost all of us have been divinely deflected from our intended career path. Those who are most fruitful can speak of taking on an assignment that they did not search for and decide for themselves, but submitted to and found that they became so much more for it. On the other hand, the best lived lives are sometimes the ones that were devoted to one people or place through all the different twists and turns.

What is critical is an initial exploration of what God is doing, seeking to discover your place in God’s overall game plan. When God’s gifting and assignment become clear, you are ready and willing to step out in obedience as a committed team player.

7. Hands-On Missionary Training:

Let’s assume you’ve completed your basic academic training. Let’s also assume you’ve had serious on-the-job ministry training within a local church. By now you have probably spent at least one brief period of time in another culture, and perhaps as long as two years in a ministry-focused cross-cultural experience. You’ve been stretched, and you’ve grown stronger as a result.

Now it’s time to figure out what kind of practical missionary training and/or ad-

vanced training you’re going to need. The kind of missionary role you will fill, and the particular continent, country or people groups among whom God wants you to minister will greatly focus the specific requirements. It will require time and actual ministry experience to develop competencies in three important dimensions—character and spiritual qualities, ministry skills, and knowledge.

The most relevant preparation for church planting in another culture is participation in and significant responsibility on a church planting team at home. Starting evangelistic Bible studies, creating cell groups, raising up leaders from the harvest and discipling new believers to the second and third generation are critical church-planting skills. You can develop in your own congregation, especially when done in partnership with a potential sending agency.

Language and culture learning are part of a missionary’s “Basic Training.” A brief introduction to language learning in your own country can help orient you to becoming an active language learner on the field.

PHASE THREE: Getting Established—Bonding

8. Apprenticeships and Internships:

Effective missionaries don’t just emerge fully formed from their educational experience. On-the-job ministry either at home or on the field tests what you’ve learned, provides models in ministry, and helps you develop your own approaches for ministry. Once on the field, a structured internship is the best way for new missionaries to learn the ropes and the rules of the game in another culture. Experienced missionaries or national pastors are the best on-the-job mentors to aid your effective acculturation. Don’t try to go it alone. Apprentice yourself to a master craftsman or woman for maximum ministry learning.

9. Life-Long Learning: On-the-Job, On-the-Field

When missionaries stop learning, they die. Establishing a life-long learning pattern early in your career is essential to finishing well. Setting yearly reading, self-study and personal development goals in the areas of spiri-



tual formation, ministry formation, and strategic formation will be life-changing. Being accountable to peers and to mentors is one of the best ways to insure that you are growing for all you're worth! Many will profit through ongoing degree-granting programs that will upgrade skills and ministry viability.

10. *Finishing Strong:*

God's pilgrimage is rich and vast. Understanding the keys to life-long development and knowing how to intentionalize your spiritual development will help you grow stronger through cross-cultural service. And we don't assume that mission service is necessarily a life-long thing for you in the same place.

Throughout scripture and church history the sad fact is that "few leaders finish well." Part of the idea of "finishing well" is to become the kind of person who helps others to "start well." Becoming an example and a mentor to others may set them on a course to surpass your wildest dreams.

CONCLUSION:

God is at work around the world completing the Big Picture. So "charting your journey" is not so much about planning a vacation cruise to the Caribbean as it is becoming intentional in joining God's foreign policy. It's taking time to pray and plan how you are going to get actively involved. It's about taking intentional steps forward rather than being

shoved around sideways by peer and career pressure. It's about moving from the grandstand to the playing field, whether as a grower or a goer. It's all about becoming "glory spreaders."

Your own journey will be unique. And charting your journey will be a life-changing process. These ten steps will help you transform your newly gained 'perspective' into a powerful vision for spiritual change.

The full interactive workbook from which this summary is taken, *Charting Your Journey to the Nations*, is designed for two kinds of people: Those who have a deep desire to serve God cross-culturally (goers), and those who want to help them (growers). It is designed to work through the process of charting a course or journey from where you are to where God would have you. It describes the path to cross-cultural service in ten steps, from initial commitment to field placement and beyond.

Each step presents an explanation of the importance of that phase of the process, and includes a place for you to keep notes, reflect, journal and gather information as you collect, plan and pray. A selected resource section in the back of the workbook will give you further information about education, missionary training and contacting mission agencies.

Remember: Your own journey will be unique. Charting your journey will be a life-changing process.

You and the nations await each other.

Study Questions

1. Which of Hoke and Taylor's steps would require a person to be in a regular relationship with others who have experience in ministry?
2. Why is mentoring a key component?

