

Greetings Short-Termers...

By GREG H. PARSONS

Written to two college students going on a short-term mission from my local church.

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I thought I'd take a moment to write out a few thoughts before you leave for Africa. I know you will have some orientation, so much of this will likely be covered before you land. I remember well my first time traveling outside the U.S. way back in 1980. I was headed the opposite direction to Southeast Asia, and it was a very instructive and shaping time for me.

This leads to my first point: **This ministry trip will involve ministry, but the greatest impact will likely be on you.** It will help to broaden and deepen your walk with the Lord and your view of the world. You will probably experience some shock when you land. As you interact with the average person from the local culture, you will see that they are concerned about different issues than we are back home. It is similar to what two African brothers, now in the U.K., noted about prayer, "Our being located in the West

[now] means that an overwhelming majority of the things we prayed for back home in Africa are taken care of: food, shelter, education..." I never thought about it that way.

The countries you are each going to are each about 50% "Christian." But anywhere we go in the world (including here), we need to remember that **being a "Christian" does not necessarily mean what we think.** For many, it is a cultural idea—they grew up going to church. You will meet many "serious" believers and will learn a lot from all kinds of people.

This speaks to the way we look at the world and what is our priority, which is a great thing to reflect on during your whole summer. I strongly encourage you to **keep a journal.** (OK, it can be electronic, and you can dictate it if you want.) You will look back on this time as something very formative for your life, walk, ministry, and future choices. I've found that reading my old journals helps me see how God has been working in my life.

That points to another reality: **You are rich.** In the eyes of virtually every non-Westerner you meet, you are rich. Naturally, that colors almost all the interaction you will have with local people. You will need to grapple with this as you serve and minister with people in the church or project or hospital. You will worship with fellow believers, eat in their homes, and see the disparity. This will also shape your perspective for the rest of your lives—at least I hope it does!

During my first trip to Indonesia, a cross-cultural worker said that when he went to the local post office, it might take over an hour to get stamps or mail a package. So, he'd buy a bunch of stamps like most of us do here in the U.S. But, he noted, for the local people, they would go, stand in the same lines and buy one—just what they needed for that day.

But it also means that you need to be careful. You will have the desire to give more than ever before. I remember giving in a church that summer in Asia, and I was probably the only one who put a paper bill in the offering! It was likely just a few dollars at most, but everyone else put in coins. The cross-cultural workers who guide you can give you input on this. My advice is to be very careful, reflect and pray, rather than being impulsive. Ask the Lord for wisdom about this and the many other things you will face.

In fact, you will likely learn to depend on the Holy Spirit more than you ever have, and that will be a *good* thing, even in the difficulties. A friend of mine, who has served

in very difficult and (in his case) very dangerous situations, has a pattern of praying, sometimes quickly in the moment, “What do you want me to *know*?” and “What do you want me to *do*?” What he was asking was, “Lord, should I know something about this situation, person, and is there something you want me to do or say or not do?” That can be hard, especially if you, like most of us, are still learning to listen to the Lord. But press into him to hear him clearly. Pray boldly for people and situations, even if quietly or silently. Expect him to speak and act through you.

He will speak through his Word too, as you know, and from others around you. So listen well.

Please keep our fellowship here updated on your time. We want to lift you up in prayer, and as I noted in our commissioning service for you both, we are your community. We have sent you out, we want (and need) to be part of that. Tell us how we can be part of what is happening there as we pray.

God's Grace to you,
Elder (Uncle) Greg ▣▣