

WEEK 1: Travel Light

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...” (Hebrews 12:1, NIV)

When going on a journey, I have never been a light packer. For me, a weekend bag is enough for a day’s visit and a week’s visit needs a bag big enough for a month-long visit.

You can imagine when I packed for two years of mission work in South East Asia. It felt like I was packing up my entire life and I was therefore going to maximize my space. I got to the airport and found out that my luggage was above the airlines restrictions. They explained the conditions and the amount that I needed to pay for an overweight bag, and at that moment, I knew I had to leave some things that were not so necessary behind. I felt the weight of the heavy cost and the heavy load, and from that day, I learned the importance of traveling light.

In our own lives’ journeys, we carry heavy loads that are not necessary for specific seasons of our lives and that keep us from being effective in our service to the Lord. For me, the heavy load that I carried to the mission field was made up of things that I thought ‘identified’ me and would still identify me in the field – my profession, my culture, my family and friendships, and even my speech, etc. All these are good things given to us by our loving Father, but there comes a time when we have to lay them aside, as they should not identify us. God can still use them, but when I realised that they were not recognised by the people I was going to and were not necessary for this specific season of my life, I knew I had to let them go.

In this season of your life, what are the things you would need to lay aside to run the race set for you? What are the things that you holding on to, that are not necessary for you and hinder you from traveling light?

WEEK 2: Those Shoes Are Not Yours

“But how can they call on Him to save them unless they believe in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, ‘How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!’” (Romans 10:14-15, NIV)

When I accepted God’s invitation to South East Asia, I realised how warm and inviting the people are. They would often invite us to their homes to be part of their family activities. As guests entered any house, they had to leave their shoes outside, so I learned to do the same.

As I left after one afternoon visit, I realised that my shoes were gone. I asked my host if she had seen them, and with a confused look on her face, she helped me to search for them. She then turned towards my worried and annoyed face and said, “Well, this is common here. Sometimes you find your shoes and sometimes you don’t. At least the person who took them left you their pair of shoes.” I looked at the shoes on the floor that were bigger than mine and very different from mine. I put them on my feet and sadly shuffled back home. The only thing running through my head was, “Those were MY shoes! How could they take MY shoes?”

Later in my journey, I realised the Lord was teaching me a valuable truth that I will never forget for the rest of my life: “Those shoes were not yours!” I realised that for many years as a Christian, I have walked in the light of the wonderful Gospel and have often forgotten to leave it with others so that they too can walk in it. I have walked comfortably in it, talked about it, and lived as if it was just meant for me. I realised that we are called as messengers to leave the Gospel for others to also walk in it, and not to possess it for ourselves.

When God invites you to move your feet and join Him in what He is doing, be assured that He will use what He has given you to leave for others. May we be willing to leave all that God has given us for those who have never been told, who have never heard and who have never believed.

What are you holding for yourself today that God is calling you to leave for others? Remember, it is not yours...

WEEK 3: Taste and See

“Taste and see that the LORD is good! How blessed is the person who trusts in Him! (Psalm 34:8, ISV)

The first time I was introduced to a Southeast Asian fruit called “durian”, I was told by the locals that the only way to know this “king of all fruits” was to taste it for myself.

Those who loved it tried to convince me to taste it by telling me that it “tasted like heaven”, while those who disliked it tried to discourage me by telling me that it “smells like hell”. For a long time, I was confused about whether I should taste it or not, until a local friend bought one especially for me and invited me to eat it. I knew I had no way out but to try it. The first thing I noticed was its strong and strange smell – I was tempted to close my nose, but out of gratitude for this gift, I dug in and tasted it. Oh boy, I loved it! It was nothing like what I had imagined, and no descriptions would have prepared me for its texture, its taste and its goodness. Today, I consider this fruit one of my favourites. And I would never have known unless I had tasted.

In our personal walk with the Lord, we know that He is good, but at times we are satisfied by hearing other people’s experiences of His goodness. With this mentality, we never fully grasp the depth of His goodness that can be experienced personally. God invites us to experience His goodness in our lives, and He opens opportunities for us to trust Him and step out even when we are afraid or feel discouraged by the “smelly” circumstances. When we taste these experiences, we perceive what God is able to do with our lives, and this instils in us a heart of gratitude as we rejoice in His goodness and inspire others to desire the same.

How is God inviting you to “taste and see” and experience His goodness? And are you willing to try?

WEEK 4: A Broken Tap

*“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; **apart from Me you can do nothing.**” (John 15:5, NIV)*

When one transitions to a new culture, there are emotional stages that one experiences. They move from being positive and excited all the time, to feeling helpless and discouraged. Eventually, one moves to coping and accepting the new culture.

One morning after breakfast, I realised that I had hit the “helpless and discouraged” stage in my transition. As I opened the tap to wash my cereal bowl, the water gushed out and the tap broke. I remember feeling so frustrated and helpless as the water flowed out of control and there was nothing I could do about it. I realised that that was how I felt in my new home. I was trying every way I could to generate conversations about Christ but feeling helpless and discouraged as there was no response from the people. It felt that my strategies were not working, and nothing was under my control.

As I sat in my room after the incident, I felt God reminding me that water from a broken tap never runs out and it is difficult to stop its flow. And when things don’t work out the way we want them to, God still has things under control. Sometimes our self-sufficiency stops God’s work from flowing out freely from our lives. I needed to be broken to allow God to pour out from my life what He desired for the people, and not in the way that I had hoped. When we feel capable and everything is going well, we have the tendency to depend on ourselves and our abilities. We need to be ‘broken taps’ and depend on God to work through our brokenness and helplessness to reach those He has brought into our lives. We need to come to a place of abiding in God – a place where we have no control, where we are incapable, and where God’s work overflows out of our dependency.

Do you feel that things are out of your control? Be assured that God does not rely on your self-sufficiency and can work through your discouragement and helplessness. And remember that “apart from Him you can do nothing.”

WEEK 5: Difficult Road, Beautiful Destination

"And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them" (Romans 8:28, NLT)

My first experience of hiking was in South East Asia and it was nothing like I had expected. I had all the equipment that I thought I needed for the hike, but even that didn't prepare me for what I was about to experience. We started our hike at the break of dawn with much excitement, but as we started to climb, I was already struggling to catch my breath. The more we walked, the more difficult the road got. When they told us that we needed to cross a stream with a strong current, I mumbled to one of the others, "But I can't swim!" To help those who couldn't swim, the leader tied a rope to a tree on the opposite side of the stream. I was terrified as I crossed over, holding on to the rope.

Just when I thought the worst was over, it started to pour, and for the next three hours, we slipped and slid as we tried to walk on mud. I was "over it", and then suddenly we heard a scream from the front and were told to move back. There was a snake on the road and it needed to move before we could continue. At this point, I wanted to turn back, because the journey just seemed to be getting more difficult.

Finally, after a whole day's walking, we reached our destination. It was dark and we couldn't see anything, but that didn't matter because we were tired and hungry and just wanted to get warm. We pitched our tents, made some food and slept. The next morning as I got out of my tent, I couldn't believe the beauty that was in front of me. I realised the difficulties of the day before had all been worth it, in light of the beauty of the destination.

Sometimes we are afraid to begin a journey because of the anticipated difficulties we might experience. At times, we find ourselves on a difficult journey and all we want to do is turn back.

But when God allows you to travel along difficult roads, do not be discouraged or dismayed. Trust in the good work that He is doing even when you can't see it. The morning will come, and when you see the beauty, you will be assured that it was all worth it.

Remember that in all things God works for the good.

WEEK 6: A Journey Towards "No Lack"

"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing." (Psalm 23:1, NIV)

"God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply." – Hudson Taylor

These words so often echo in my heart when I trust the Lord for His provision for where He chooses to send me. At times, He uses known people as a means of His provision, and at other times, He 'miraculously' supplies (no one knows where it comes from). Once, when I had to leave for training before my time in the field, I was not prepared for the means He would use and the lesson He would teach me.

At the time, I was trusting the Lord for the rest of the money for my plane ticket to Asia. I only shared this need with my family so that they could pray for me. A week after sharing at one of the churches in my home town about the people group that God was calling me to, I got a call from a family at that church asking me to come to their home. Unfortunately, I was not in town, but I made a point to go there as soon as I got back home, as it sounded quite urgent. When I got to their home, the whole family was sitting in the dining area and the pastor was also present. I started getting nervous as they invited me to sit down with them. I noticed the 10-year-old son sitting in what looked like the centre seat, and the father broke the ice by sharing the boy's story. He said that his son was at the meeting when I had shared about the particular people group, and when they got home, the son told his parents that he felt the Lord telling him to give all his savings to me. He had been saving for years to buy a bicycle, keeping all his birthday money and pocket money, and now the Lord was asking him to give it all up.

I sat with tears in my eyes and whispered to the Lord that I couldn't accept that. I couldn't take the boy's money. How could the Lord expect a child to give up all that he had saved? The family saw how difficult it was for me to accept, and the dad continued, saying, "This is a significant journey that the Lord is walking with my son." I then realised that the boy chose to not lack in the things of God; he chose to not lack in obedience to God's voice and to not lack in sacrifice for God's chosen course. I was humbled and challenged that my own faith was found lacking.

What are you lacking in your journey with the Lord? Is it obedience to what He is telling you to do? Is it faith to trust Him for His provision, or the courage to step out where He is leading you? Whatever your lack, give it to God and see what He is able to do in your journey towards "no lack".

WEEK 7: Transitional Turbulence

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9, ESV)

I am one of those people who HATE turbulence with a passion. My first time flying was with a group of students from my university, when we were invited by a missionary in Russia to join a group of young people for a camp during our mid-year holiday. After experiencing turbulence during that first flight, I developed an extreme anxiety about it. I remember feeling uncomfortable and afraid, as I was not in control. What helped at that time was that I was surrounded by experienced travelers in my group and they assured me not to worry. I later realised that the aircraft was designed to withstand changes and disruptions in air movement, but most times when I fly alone, I seem to forget this fact and think myself into a panic.

While traveling with one of my teammates during my time in Asia, I experienced some of the worst turbulence I have ever felt. My teammate could see that I was struggling, and she offered to hold my hand. I knew that was not going to change the situation, but it brought much comfort and somehow made the journey bearable.

Recently, I have started thinking of any "transition" phase in my life as a period of turbulence on my journey. When God changes things in our lives, it's never a smooth process – we see this in the life of Joshua and the Israelites. Just like them, we tend to fear these kinds of situations and become anxious about them because we do not feel in control of the uncomfortable bumps. But God assures us, just as He assured them, that He is with us wherever we go.

At times, God will surround you with people who will speak experience and comfort as they hold your hand during your season of transition, but at other times, He will let you travel alone so that He can reassure you to be strong and courageous as you are designed to withstand these changes. He will also remind you of His presence in these seasons.

Whatever transitional turbulence you might be experiencing, remember to stay strong and courageous, to surround yourself with a good team, and to wait it out for He is with you wherever you go.

WEEK 8: Just Love Them

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1 John 4:11, ESV)

Last year while visiting Lebanon, we were graced by the presence of pastors and Christians from Syria. Among the visitors was a single, middle-aged lady. She shared with us how she was comfortable in her Christianity until the war began. When things were in chaos, she started to ask God what to do – what God's will was for her life. God opened a door for her to live with a people group from another religion, and there she was confronted with the people's pain and losses due to the war. She would patiently listen to their stories, and when she got home, she would cry

before the Lord. She constantly asked God what should she do with what the people were telling her, and she would feel the Lord saying to her, "Just love them."

If we think of the ministry of Jesus, it was not just words but also action. It wasn't planned encounters with others, but stopping for whoever was in front of Him and actively loving them.

Sometimes in our work and ministry, we focus on planned activities and events, but it is often the unplanned ministry that Jesus uses – it's the relationships and everyday connections of people that God puts in our path to show His love through us. If we stop for a moment and look at who is around us, we will notice the people that God wants us to **JUST LOVE**.

Jesus' ministry was as simple as loving others.

WEEK 9: Places of Hope

"But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently." (Romans 8:24b, NIV)

During a visit to Lebanon, we were able to visit a few refugee camps. As we were driving to the first camp, I started imagining a place of discouragement, where families had lost everything because of the war and children were traumatised. But to my surprise, there was life in the camps. Children ran to meet us, played and sang songs. Some of our team quickly joined them while the rest offered medical assistance.

While I was playing and singing with a group of young girls, I noticed them whispering to each other. I couldn't understand what they were saying but they pointed towards me and nodded their heads. The girls then invited me to their huddle and indicated that I should come with them. I wasn't sure where they were taking me, but I followed because I figured they wanted to show me something. As I ran behind them, they went under a broken fence and stood on the other side, calling me to follow them. I was starting to have some doubts about following them, but I continued on. When we got to an open field, I saw what they wanted to show me. In the midst of their discouragement and uncertainty, they had built an imaginary 'home'. They showed me their 'kitchen' and 'lounge' and they invited me to sit with them and share their imaginary food. I sat there trying to hold back my tears as I recognised the hope that was living within their hearts.

God often invites us to build places of hope in our own lives. There are countless things that discourage us daily, but if we want to learn the remedy for discouragement, we need to look with confidence and expectation to the God of hope. If we let our hearts be ruled by what we see, we will stop dreaming, desiring and hoping. If we have hope, we have life.

In the midst of your discouragement, what places of hope is God calling you to build? May the God of hope be with you today.

WEEK 10: Just Be

"For You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well." (Psalm 139:13-14, NIV)

Whenever I would go on any outreach or mission trip, I always had the tendency to ask myself what it was that I had to offer the people, and whether it would be enough. While preparing for my time in Asia, I read a book called "Woman Crossing Borders", and one day, with these thoughts in my mind, I read a section titled "When Being is Enough". I was encouraged by what the missionary from Morocco shared: that our sense of worth should not be found in our work, accomplishments or what we think we can offer. Thus, I made it my mission to go to the field and just be me.

A few months into my language learning, while I was struggling to even understand the basics of the language, I became concerned about the fact that I wasn't achieving Phase 1 in my studies. And I forgot to just be. One morning during my language session, I focused on improving my language skills by practicing them. I went to the juice stall of a friendly lady who was always willing to chat with me, even when I didn't understand most of the words. As I was trying to listen closely and respond appropriately, a lady on her bicycle stopped at the stall to buy some juice. While my language friend was preparing the juice for her, the lady kept on looking at me from head to toe. She observed everything about me – how I spoke and what I looked like. I started feeling a bit uncomfortable with the way she was gazing at me, but I turned my head and looked back at her and gently smiled. That softened her look towards me, and she uttered these words: "You are black, but you are sweet." And then she smiled back.

From then on, I realised that the people in the community were not interested in whether I could speak well, or what I could offer them. They were interested in the fact that I could simply live in their community as an African girl, who could be friendly and warm towards them and just be the person that God created me to be. I remembered once again that being me was enough for the context I was in. I didn't need to perform or prove anything to anyone, and all that I had to do was show up in the lives of others.

What things are you trying to accomplish in your life? Don't let them define who you are. God created you and has put in you all that He saw was necessary for your life journey, and that should be enough for you to just "be". You are enough.