



Think Home

A guide for International students preparing to return home



friends
INTERNATIONAL

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“Go through history, beginning in the book of Acts, God has seen fit to draw many people to himself when they have been away from home. However, many face particular challenges, even active hostility when they return home after finding Christ in another culture. But if they are able to adjust well, they have the potential to make a major influence to the growth of the church in their own culture. This little booklet is aimed specifically at helping those returnees to withstand the challenges of returning to their home culture. It is an invaluable help, both for those who are returning and those who wish to help them to stand firm in Christ and serve Him fruitfully in their home cultures.”

(Lindsay Brown, International Director of the Lausanne Movement and former IFES General Secretary)

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TQs – Tough Questions throughout the book – found at the end of most chapters to help you think things through more practically.

1 Introduction

Are you an international student who will soon be returning home? If so, this book is for YOU!

When you first came to the UK you may have suffered some culture shock as you experienced aspects of life in the UK which are different from life at home. It is well known that entering a new culture and country can be a stressful experience!

But what about returning to your own culture (often called 're-entry') after a time away? Could that be just as stressful? Surprisingly, the answer is YES!

You may think that going home is returning to all that is familiar, but the reality is that you have changed during your time in the UK. It may be the food you eat, the clothes you wear, the friends you have, your use of time or it may be deeper changes at the level of attitudes, value and beliefs. **You have changed!** And life back home may also have changed while you have been away. Family, friends, and work colleagues will have certain expectations of you (and you of them). *Or they may not know what to expect as you return!* Successful re-entry will depend on how well prepared you are to handle these changes and expectations.

THINK HOME is a workbook designed to help you think through:

- the realities of 'reverse culture shock'
- the process of re-entry to your home culture
- the responses you may make to the situations you face on return

The workbook is particularly helpful for you if you are a Christian, have become a Christian during your time in the UK or have shown interest in the Christian faith while in the UK.

Making the most of this book:

THINK HOME is **not** designed to be read from cover to cover in one sitting. It is a workbook that asks lots of questions for you to think about and answer from your own situation. It is a book that is best worked through with others so that you can discuss some of the issues raised – in a small group or perhaps with a friend who is also about to return home or with a British friend you have got to know while here in the UK. Some parts you may prefer to do on your own. Not all of it will apply to you.

Try not to rush through the material. Give adequate time for discussion, personal reflection and prayer as you seek to prepare yourself for the challenges and opportunities of returning home.

If you are returning home as a Christian, you do not return home alone. Jesus Christ returns with you – you do not leave him behind in the UK! Whilst you may encounter many situations that will challenge your faith, remember Jesus' promise to his disciples – "... *surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*". (Matthew 28:20) – a promise that is true for you if you are his disciple today. God is sending you back as his child to live for him and to serve him in your family, among your friends, in your work situation and in your nation.

May this book be helpful to you as you prepare to return home.

2 Why are you returning home?

It may be that you are very excited to be going home or it might be that the thought of going home is frightening. This chapter is to help you think through that process.

1. Why are you returning home? Tick all those that apply:

- Visa has expired
- Finished my studies
- Family needs me
- Job waiting for me
- Honour commitment to company/government/church
- Ready to go home
- Country/church needs me
- Want to go home
- Home is God's place for me
- Personal commitments to honour
- Financial reasons
- Goal(s) for coming to the UK achieved
- Other _____

2. What are your hopes and fears about returning home?

3. Would you prefer to stay in the UK? Yes/No. Why, or why not?



SPOTLIGHT

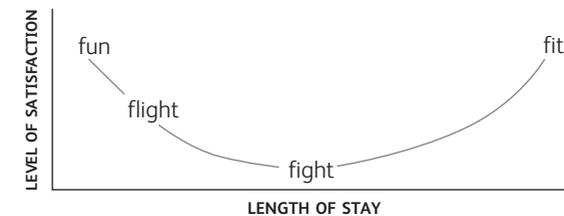
Have a look at Psalm 23. This is a wonderful description of the Lord as our Shepherd. He cares for us, guides us, protects us, comforts us and provides for our every need.

God promises to be with us every step of our journey, guiding us by his Spirit through his Word and his people.

3 The reality of reverse culture shock

Just as you experienced 'culture shock' when you first came to the UK, so you will also go through some form of 'reverse culture shock' when you return home.

The important thing to remember is that you are not the only one experiencing re-entry stress. It is a common experience for those who have returned home after a period of time away. People in transition often go through the following stages:



For those returning home these stages can be described as follows:

Fun is when there is initial excitement and joy at being back home once again.

Flight is when your time as a 'celebrity' is over, and you are faced with the daily demands of work and life back home. You may begin wishing for your life back in the UK.

Fight is when there is a lot of frustration and anger towards your home situation, and you criticise and distance yourself from others.

Fit happens when you are able to resolve your inner conflicts, find your right place back home, and feel confident that you are making a positive contribution to others.

'Continuing re-entry stress' says Dr. Clyde Austin, a Christian psychologist and editor of two re-entry books, 'is normal for 6-12 months. A significant minority may experience readjustment stress beyond that point.'

“ I was in a familiar city, among familiar people, speaking my mother tongue, picking up the dialect in the street, but feeling like a stranger!”

A student returning home

You will experience reverse culture shock when you first return home because:

- a) You have changed during your time in the UK and
- b) Life at home has changed while you have been in the UK.

The following chapters help you to think through these changes

4 Your life in the UK

In coming to the UK, you will have seen and experienced so many different things. Whenever anyone has lived in another culture, they usually find that their outlook on life changes due to the experiences they have had: often they will be returning home a different person, perhaps even with a whole different worldview. As you think about going home, think back to when you first arrived and how you have changed over the past months/years.

General Experience

1. List in the table below the factors that made your stay positive and enjoyable and the factors that made your stay unpleasant and difficult.

POSITIVE and ENJOYABLE	UNPLEASANT and DIFFICULT

2. List the things (values, lifestyles, attitudes, practices, technology, etc...) you like/do not like about living in the UK:

LIKE	DO NOT LIKE

3. From the list of things you like, which ones would you want to take home with you? Why?

From the list of things you do not like – have you learned anything through them? (Be honest with yourself!)

4. What were your goals in coming to the UK? Were they fulfilled?

5. Apart from study, what experiences have most enriched you and how?

6. What friendships and/or significant people have influenced you most? Why?

Christian/Church Experience

1. What are your observations of Christianity in the UK? How is it different from Christianity back home?

2. Have your attitudes to the Christian faith been affected by your relationships with Christians in the UK?

3. What factors helped or hindered your Christian growth while in the UK?

4. What did you appreciate about your UK church life and experience?

5. What UK church practices will not work or fit back home? Why?

If you are returning home as a Christian or as a serious seeker who will be continuing your journey of faith, it is important to recognise that the way Christians express their faith differs in different cultures. While there are biblical truths and principles that are always true everywhere, there are also cultural expressions of the Christian faith which vary from one culture to another. It is important to understand the difference between the two, i.e.

- Biblical principles that are universal and apply to all Christians in all cultures (B).
- Cultural expressions of our faith that vary from one culture to another (C).

If you are a Christian returning home, you do not want to return as a 'British' Christian. Be aware that you may meet Christians in your home country who do things very differently from what you have experienced in the UK. They may be expressing biblical truths in ways that are relevant to their/your home culture, which may not be exactly how British Christians would practise the same biblical truths or principles. Alternatively they may be practising cultural expressions of their faith which are inconsistent with biblical truth and therefore need to be challenged. This situation will need to be handled with sensitivity and love. You may want to meet with them to look at the Bible together to discover what are truly universal biblical principles and how they can be applied in your culture.

The following exercise will help you to think through this distinction. The examples are not intended to cover all the situations you may face, but to encourage you to start thinking biblically about cultural differences.

Mark 'C' if you think the statement below is a cultural expression of our faith, and 'B' if you think it is a biblical principle:

For example:

- C** Being prompt at every meeting and appointment
- B** Being prayerful

- ___ Queuing when waiting for a bus or paying for something
- ___ Making sure you telephone before 'dropping in' or visiting a person's home
- ___ Expressing your feelings openly and directly
- ___ Being honest
- ___ Having wine at communion
- ___ Thinking of others before yourself
- ___ Supporting your parents materially and in every way you can
- ___ Having the right to speak freely in public
- ___ Saving up money for your retirement
- ___ Respecting the elders among you
- ___ Greeting each other with a kiss
- ___ Having a church building
- ___ Being happy
- ___ Doing things decently and in order
- ___ Using any musical instrument for worship - drums, pianos, guitars
- ___ Providing little children with their own church service
- ___ Believing in democracy
- ___ Practising hospitality
- ___ Giving to those who are in need
- ___ Going to church on Sunday
- ___ Wearing smart clothes to church

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