

Peru: From culture shock to continuing mission

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During the two months I served as a summer mission in Peru, there were times when I was hungry, times when I was cold and times when I missed my family. I was ready to return to my homeland, tie a flag around my neck and run around like all those stereotypical, Fourth-of-July celebrators. I even sang “God Bless America” as I landed on the airstrip at the DFW Airport. I cried in the embrace of my family, because the sense of relief overtook me. I had set foot on American soil, felt safe and was able to breathe. I was ready to step off that plane—or so I thought.

✖ Maci Bryant taught children during her time as a summer missionary in Peru. I thought I was ready until the first day I went out by myself. I went to a nail salon to get my cat claws taken care of. As I sat down, a sweet man with a wedding ring sat in front of me. I could not help but think that he was rubbing my feet to feed his family. I began to tear up, and as I left the shop and entered my car, the tears made like small streams down my cheeks. Why was I so selfish?

The day after, I went shopping at a big-box discount center. I said hello, but got the cold shoulder. I tried to make my way down the aisle, but there were what seemed like a million people walking at light speed. I got into my car and cried.

I am just not used to it. I am not used to feeling so foreign in my own country. I began to see the similarities between a foreign country and my own country. I realized one reason I was acting the way I was is because I felt like missionary all over again, and I just was not expecting that.

I was not ready to try and give advice, to work to be a missionary in my own country, to love people, to take exactly what I learned and apply to my everyday life. It is really easy to say that you are going to be thankful, to love people, to not gripe or complain, etc. It is easy to devote time—a week, a month, two months or even a year—to improve lives in another country. It is easy to become a totally different person in another country. However, getting off that plane and applying a new lifestyle to your old one is anything but easy. It is easy to say you're a missionary while you are overseas. It is easy to post verses on social media, to be happy and to serve the Lord in another country. On the other hand, it is so hard to come back to the place in which you live and continue your mission. Like I said, it is hard to get off that airplane.

✖ Showing the love of Christ to children in Peru can be easier than demonstrating the love of Christ to neighbors and classmates in Texas, Maci Bryant discovered. But here is why you need to get off that airplane—physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. When people get back from mission trips, especially young people like me, they may be mad because they long for another country. They do not understand. They may lash out at America, blaming everything wrong with America on the Christians here who they feel are not doing anything to further God's kingdom. They let their anger cause them to ball up and withdraw from the world until they can get through the months until they can leave the country again. They let their anger confuse them. They blame it on God. They become the ones who do nothing to further God's kingdom.

Why did I need to get off that plane? I needed to get off that plane because the moment I stepped foot on American soil, I saw the need for Christ in America as I had never seen it before. I saw the neglect I had cast upon my own country due to the fact that I was focused on the well-being, betterment and beliefs of countries other than my own. I saw a need I had not been meeting during the time I have been living here. I saw where I

had allowed Satan to fill me with enough anger and selfishness that I had not went outside, on a mission, to make disciples in my own community.

I had let my calling to another country stop me from fulfilling my original calling to be a missionary in this country. “Go and make disciples of all nations.” That’s *all* nations, including our own. Yet so many people who say they have a calling for foreign missions misses that one important word—all. That means that no matter where you are called, you are being a missionary wherever you are.

I needed to step off that plane to witness on my campus, in my hometown, and to all ends of where I live my daily life. Missionaries are needed here. Christ is needed here. Love is needed here. The spoken truth of God is needed here.

So, fellow missionaries, start being a missionary here. I challenge you, no matter where you are called, to be a missionary where God has you. Do not let the future or the past stop you from making disciples in the present. Go make those disciples. Go make disciples out of your classmates, your neighbors, your families. Go and see that the Lord will give you peace. Go and see that the Lord will supply you with exactly what you need. Go and see that the Lord will bless. Go until the Lord calls you elsewhere. Go.

Maci Bryant, a student at Tarleton State University, served in Peru with Go Now Missions.