

BEST PRACTICES IN SHORT-TERM HEALTHCARE MISSIONS

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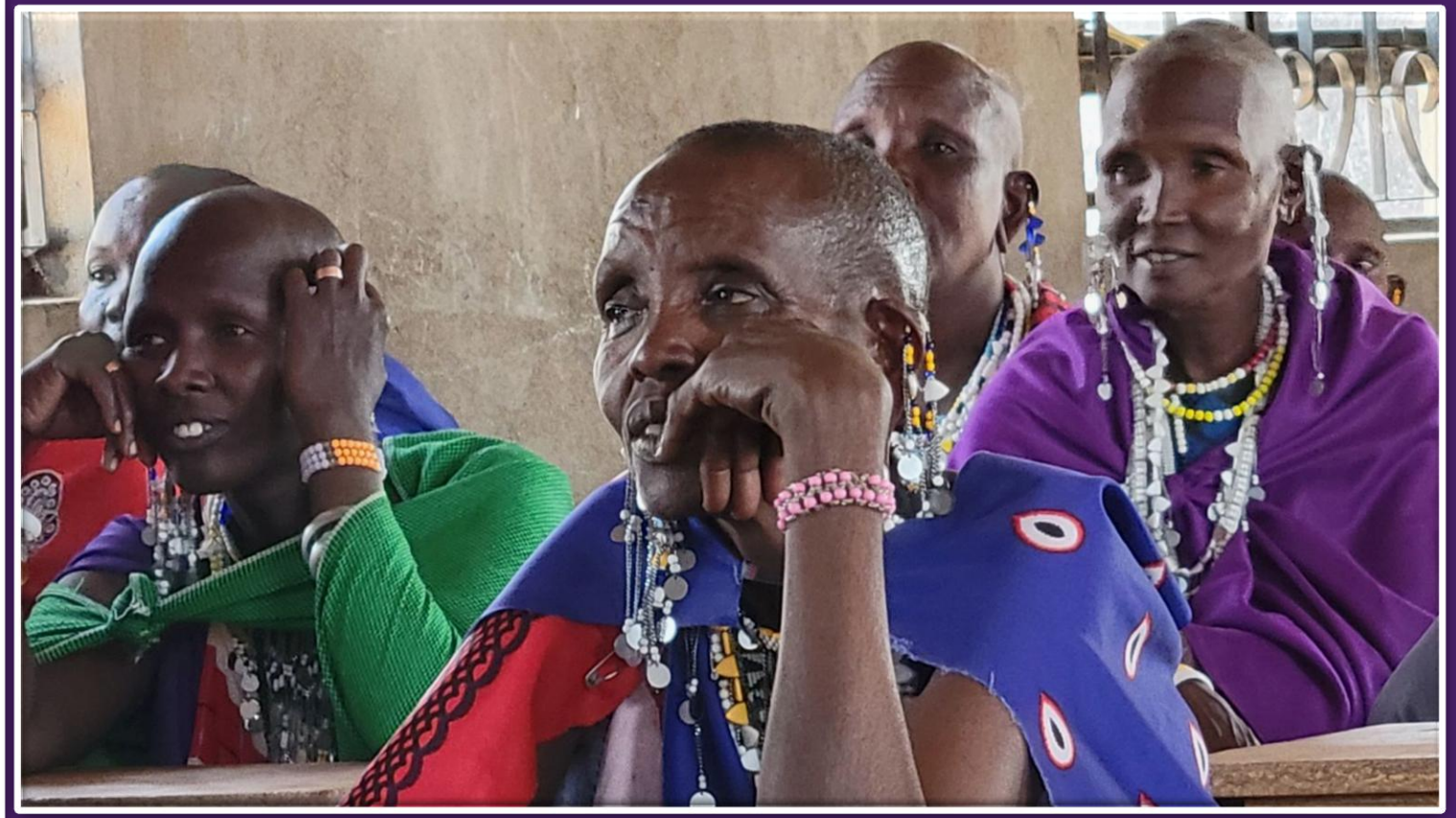
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Prayer



Objectives

- Discuss the components of good training for short-term healthcare missions.
- Evaluate effective cross-cultural communication strategies in healthcare missions.
- Recognize the importance of providing safe, evidence-based healthcare while serving.





My Experience

- PICU, CVICU, ECMO, Transport, Educator, Manager
- Community Development with Vulnerable Populations
- Community Health Evangelism (CHE)
- Faith Community Nursing
- Academic Service Learning

Introduction

- Many healthcare professionals participate in short-term medical missions to make a difference.
- Yet research and experience suggest that enthusiasm and clinical expertise alone do not guarantee effective service.
- Inadequate preparation can unintentionally contribute to ethical concerns, cultural misunderstandings, safety risks, and unsustainable practices.



What is Your Motivation to Go?

- Altruism
- Addressing gaps in care
- Immediate impact
- Professional growth
- Learn adaptability
- Combat burnout



The Call to Serve – Why Missions Matter



- We can promote healing and human flourishing.
- Missions create opportunities for partnership, capacity building, and sustainable impact.
- We are called to follow Jesus's example of compassionate service and holistic care.
- Every person bears the image of God and deserves dignified, ethical, and culturally responsive care.

Holistic Caring

- Reflecting reverence, respect, and awe towards others.
- Recognizing our patients' suffering.
- Engaging in discovering meaning for and with patients.
- Demonstrating love for those who are vulnerable and whom society would ignore.





Suffering – Seeing the World With His Eyes

- Are we too busy to actually see the suffering?
- Showing compassion – seeing beyond the physical needs of those the Lord puts in our path.
- Do we recognize their spiritual needs?
- Keeping a Kingdom perspective – the Lord is sovereign and has a plan and purpose for all things.

Common Pitfalls

- Clinical Pitfalls – practicing outside scope
- Cultural Pitfalls – assuming Western solutions are always best
- Ethical Pitfalls – offering interventions without informed consent
- Teamwork Pitfalls – unclear roles
- Safety Pitfalls – not being prepared



Ethical Concerns

- Lack of Continuity and Patient Safety – no follow-up care
- Disruption of Local Healthcare Systems – undermining local clinics
- Cultural Insensitivity and Power Imbalances – the "Savior" complex
- Poor Resource Allocation and Sustainability – high cost and low impact



Best Practices to Address Ethical Challenges

- Mandatory host collaboration and system integration
- Ensuring patient safety and continuity of care
- Sustainable capacity building
- Rigorous pre-departure orientation



Summary of Core Ethical Principles

Traditional Approach	Modern Best-Practice Guidelines
Volunteer centric – focus on the travel experience	Host centric – prioritize host defined benefits and community safety
Isolated action – pop up clinics outside local networks	System integration – coordinates with local ministry of health
Band-aid solutions – focus on high-volume, temporary relief	Capacity building – invests in training local clinicians
Questionable ethics – practicing outside scope	Fixed standards – uses universal ethical standards

So, We All Need Pre-Field Training



Without preparation, mission teams may:

- Cause unintended harm
- Struggle with cultural misunderstandings
- Face avoidable safety risks
- Create ethical concerns
- Reduce long-term impact



Good Training Includes

- Prayer
- Discipleship
- Culture
- Culture Shock
- Safety and Security
- Academic discipline
- Task – on-site engagement
- Re-entry

Let's talk about how to prepare before we go to prevent the pitfalls.

Prayer – Spiritual Warfare

- Spiritual warfare is real, and believers have the tools they need for the battle.
- *Put on the full armor of God, so that you can **take your stand** against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*
- *(Eph. 6: 11-12).*



How Spiritual Warfare May Appear

Conflict within the team	**Response: practice humility and forgiveness**
Discouragement and doubt	**Response: stay grounded in the Word**
Physical and emotional exhaustion	**Response: prioritize rest when possible**
Fear and anxiety	**Response: pray specifically against fear.**
Pride and self-reliance	**Response: give glory to God**
Cultural misunderstandings	**Response: learn about the culture before going and listen to nationals**

Discipleship



Discipleship – More Than the Task

- Starts before departure
- Continues on the field
- Leaders walk alongside
- Reflection and debriefing
- Modeling servanthood
- Learning from nationals
- Continues after returning home.



Things to Consider

- What religions/worldviews are prevalent there?
- What kind of food will you eat?
- What kind of weather should you expect?
- Where will you sleep?
- Are you part of a team or going alone?
- What kind of preparation will you have before going?

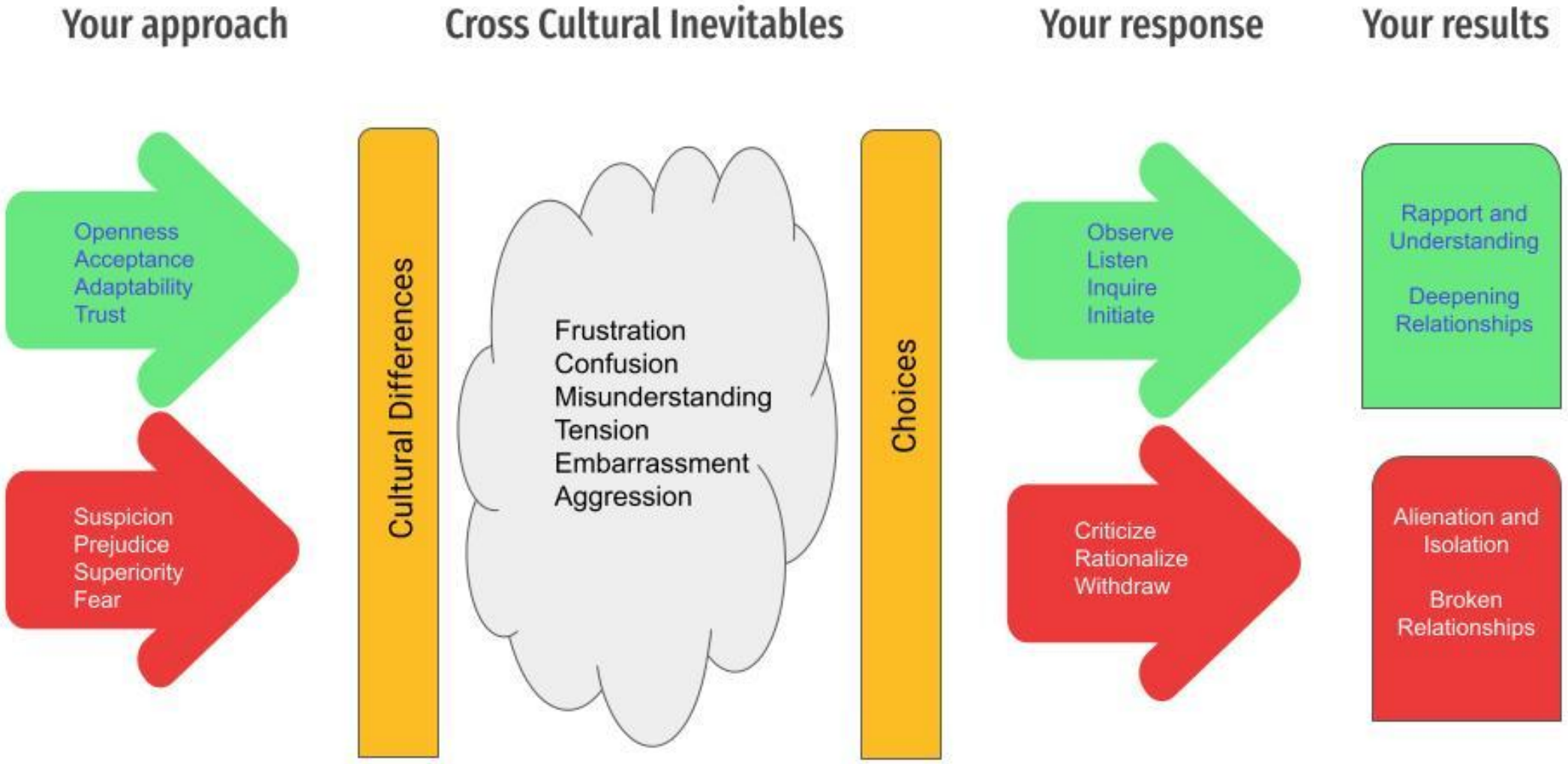


Culture

- It is more than just ethnicity.
- Culture influences everything!
- *All of you, clothe yourselves with **humility** toward one another, because "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble"* (1 Peter. 5.5)



Entry Posture Diagram





Cultural Humility

- Humility seeks to understand, shows honor and respect to others, looks for opportunities to serve others, and begins with knowing who you are.
- It is a process of **self-reflection** to gain a deeper understanding of cultural differences in order to improve the way vulnerable groups are treated.
- The personal reflection is followed by an appreciation of the other person's perspective.



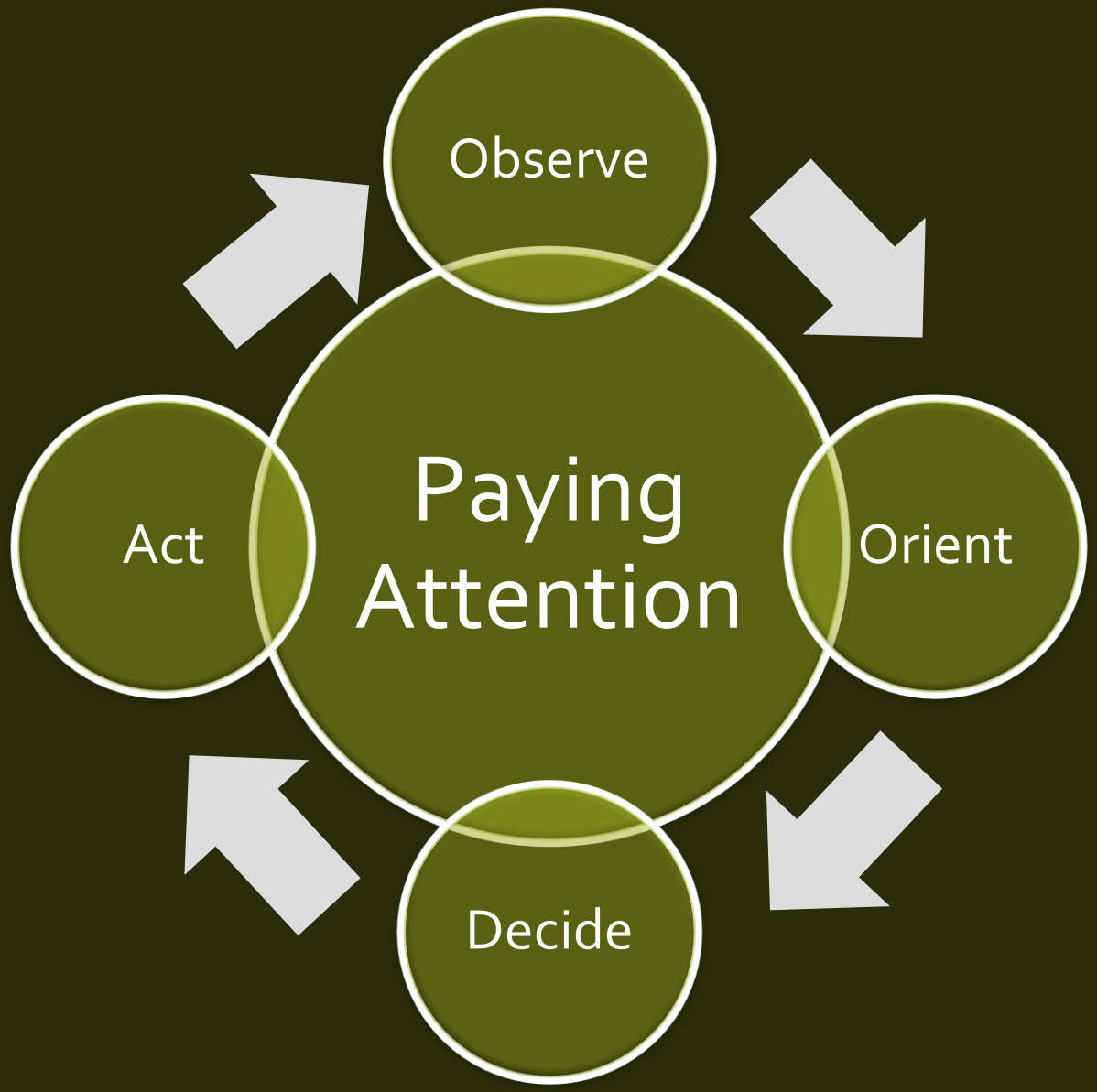
Safety & Security Training

It is important to include safety and security training before going overseas.

Patient Safety – first, do no harm!

Personal Safety

- Prevent diseases – immunizations, water, food.
- Snakes, scorpions, and…
- Buddy system – always
- Rally point – in case of disaster



Threat Recognition & Response

Stay calm and get to safety.

Stay with people you trust – buddy system.

Maintain accountability.

Call for help.

Petty Theft or Robbery

Pickpocketing or phone snatching.

The thief relies on speed and surprise.

- Do not resist
- Do not pursue or fight
- Be a good witness

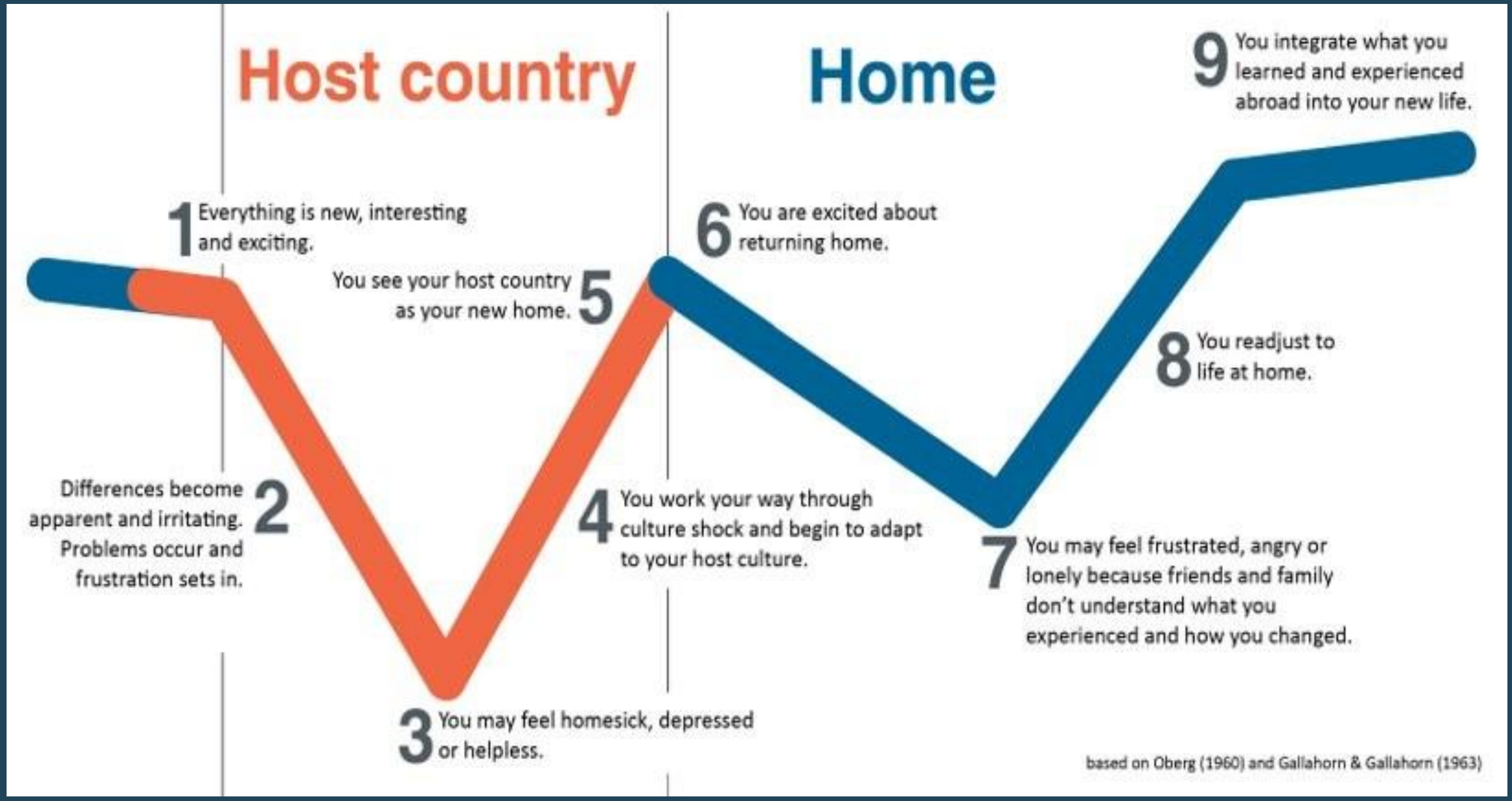




On-Site Engagement

- Pray before every outing.
- Put away your phone – be attentive.
- When invited, go into people's homes and pray with them.
- Learn key phrases of the language.
- Ask questions – do not make negative comments about the culture.
- Serve alongside the national team with a smile.
- Debrief at the end of every day.

Re- Entry Shock



Practical Tools

- Be willing to serve.
- Practice cultural humility.
- Communicate respectfully.
- Use ethical global health standards.
- Remain within your scope of practice.
- Find out about local diseases and conditions.

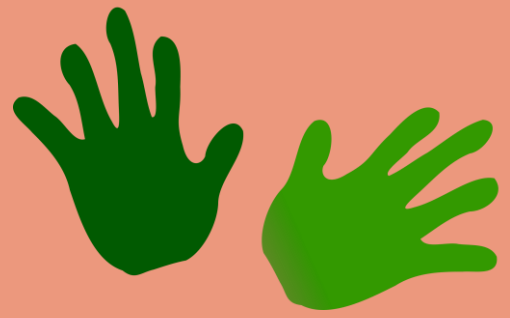


Head, Heart, & Hands

Building Bridges









In His Image

- *Imago Dei* – people are created in His image and have inherent dignity and worth.
- God desired that all people experience peace (*shalom*).
- Jesus came that all people may have life and have it abundantly (Jn. 10:10).
- *Missio Dei* – Christians are invited to participate in God's healing work by proclaiming and witnessing to the Good News in both word and deed.



Why Go and Serve?

- The more we yield to God, the more clearly we will see our purpose and calling.
- Serving is sacred work, with power, grace, and humility; we can perform small tasks with love.
- We are touching the body of Christ when we care for those covered with dirt, maggots, and wounds.





God's Glory is the Reason for the Mission

- Missions exist because worship doesn't (John Piper).
- Our calling is to continue the work that the Lord began until He returns.



What Questions Do You Have?

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Nov. 12, first QR Code
Nov. 14, second QR code







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