

# INTRODUCTION

The Missionary in Us

I once thought “forgotten” people lived across the ocean in make-shift huts and colorful villages. Their children ran around half-naked and seemed perfectly content playing with homemade toys and rusty cans. Their beautiful mothers, lean and strong, balanced woven baskets on the crown of their head.

These kind people, born into places we can't quite pronounce, waited for us to leave our church campuses and minister to them. And we do. We pack new sandals and shirts, sunscreen and Bibles, and iPod to pump us up on the plane. We jet through airports and customs and pray doubly hard as the conveyer belt leisurely produces our luggage.

We set a spiritual Facebook status as we load fifteen people into an eight-passenger van. We trek into unfamiliar terrain laughing giddy because we have saved and sacrificed to be in that very place, that place where we don't speak the language or quite understand the culture. We have a burning desire to share Jesus Christ, to tell others of what He has done in our lives and how He has a plan for each of us. Thankfulness nearly bubbles over.

As for those ten to fourteen days we almost consider ourselves missionaries, wrapping sweaty bandanas around our head and forgoing warm showers and café mochas. We

kiss babies we've just met and hug necks of new friends. We give all that we have. We hold back nothing. We pray for translators and drivers and spend our few extra moments writing down the miracles God is doing in that strange and wonderful place.

We barely sleep at night, even though we have rung out the day. We haven't got a drop of energy left.

This must be what it feels like to be a missionary.

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Before I reach the coffee maker, I notice a stack of postcards – bright yellow and neon green – that sit perfectly one on top of the other. They're reserved for eight visitors in Sunday school this week, six boys and two girls. Thoughts of them clomping down the church hall, so close their shoulders touched, made me wish for the weekend all over again.

Estran, the obvious leader of the group, a head taller than the others stopped when he spotted my construction paper name tag.

"Hey, is this place for kids?"

I barely managed to swallow a giggle. I had seen him and his comrades on their way to church, some skipping, some running, a couple riding their bikes. There wasn't a parent in sight.

And an hour later, I watched them bounce out of Sunday school, some still wearing morning snack in the crease of their smile. Each one carried a brand new Bible.

Just as they were about to race out of glass doors and into the neighborhood, a little girl came walking back to me. Portia, tiny for her age and draped in a fleece coat that hung like a bathrobe past her knees, whispered, making sure no one could hear, “I can’t pay for this,” and she sheepishly handed me the Bible given to her just minutes earlier.

“There’s no cost; it’s free,” I gladly tell her, wrapping my arms around her thin frame, hoping she’ll be back next week.

And like a mama to a baby she pulled the Bible tight to her chest and ran down the hall singing, “It’s free! It’s free!”

The mission field isn’t always across the ocean, suitcase in hand.

Sometimes it is just down the street.