Bags Packed, Hearts Ready

Stories of God's Faithfulness in Cross-Cultural Ministry

Sue Eenigenburg



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17 Moves and Counting

Packing again. We plan to be gone for four months. If no one rents our apartment by the time we return, we may move back in! But it doesn't matter because we still must pack and store everything!

Regardless of whether we move back in or have to find a new place, this makes our seventeenth move in forty-five years of marriage. Seven of those have been international. Moving, whether it is country to country or around the block, is hard. It is a lot of packing either way! Sorting through it all and deciding what to keep and what to toss can be stressful and both decisions cause grief.

Years ago, our language school gave us a painting as a thank-you gift. It was a copy of "The Angelus" originally entitled "Prayer for the Potato Crop" by Millet. It portrayed a man and his wife in the field pausing in their work to pray. I loved its beauty and meaning. We had limited space, and the painting wouldn't fit in our luggage. I am thankful it found a good home with new believers in Jesus. But I mourned its loss. Even today, when I remember it, I wish I had it to hang on our wall.

For another move, one of our kids had made a basket in his pottery class at school. Handmade and special, we packed it to take with us. Somehow in the move it broke, and we had to throw it away. It seems silly to be so sad over a broken possession from so many years ago. Yet I still remember my keen disappointment seeing the shattered pieces.

On one of our trips back to the US after our first few terms of overseas ministry, we were at my parents' home. We were looking through things we had stored there. I came upon a big box. Not sure what was in it, I opened it only to find other smaller boxes. Empty boxes. I looked at my dad and asked, "Why would I do this?" He said, "I have no idea." Why I could hang on to a box of empty boxes and not keep more treasured items, I don't know!

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With every move, no matter how often I've done it, a sense of instability maneuvers its way into my soul. Moving always involves some uncertainty. Emotions fluctuate. Grieving sometimes and rejoicing sometimes over what was. I seek to dwell in the "what is" world yet wonder about the "what will come." Sometimes I processed emotions and transitions well and other times I didn't. Regardless, it was never easy.

So once again I wrap up my teacups and put away pictures. Boxes are now lined up on shelves. Bubble wrap is in a tidy little pile. Other piles aren't quite so tidy! It won't be long, and we will be transient again. We will travel, share ministry updates, and connect with family and friends. This all adds to my sense of not belonging to any one place or tribe. But, on the other hand, I find out that because of being in God's family, I can belong about anywhere! My tribe is large and spread out around the world!

As we sort, pack, and travel, rumblings reverberate in my soul: "You are rootless—insecure, unsettled, adrift." These are lies. The truth is that by God's grace I have the certain assurance that I am securely rooted in Jesus. Wherever I go. Whether I am in a home or traveling without one. Whether I have my things with me or not. Whether I even have things or not. I don't find my refuge and strength in where I am or what I own. My security comes from God, knowing I belong to him.

I am grateful for the privilege to do what we do and to serve where we are. I appreciate yet another opportunity to realize anew the certainty of my calling to Jesus. Wherever I go and wherever I live in this uncertain world, there remains the certainty that I am his and he is mine.

Scripture

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:1–2)

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Questions

1. What emotions does "move" stir in your soul?

2. What losses have you grieved in your moves?

3. How does God's calling and presence soothe your heart?

Prayer

I am so grateful that I am your daughter. Nothing can sway your love for me. My roots are deep, and I can't be shaken loose. Sometimes, I feel muddled in this world with different homes and cultures speaking into my life. I try to figure out how to live well wherever I am and at times it is so hard to adapt because I am uncomfortable. Keep me close to you and help me remember my forever home is with you. Amen.

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