

Cross-Cultural Perspectives from the General Director



Living between Worlds

The old saying goes, “Jack of all trades, and master of none.” Missionaries in the midst of multi-tasking can relate. They are pilgrims in many worlds, and feel like they are citizens of none. This isn’t really a new phenomenon. Early men and women of faith experienced some of the same feelings. The writer of Hebrews wrote concerning those in the heavenly Hall of Faith:

“All these faithful ones...saw it all from a distance and welcomed the promises of God. ***They agreed that they were no more than foreigners and nomads here on earth.*** And obviously people who talk like that are looking forward to a country they can call their own. If they had meant the country they came from, they would have found a way to go back. But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland” (Hebrews 11:13-16, *NLT*).

Consider missionary kids that live in (at least) three cultural contexts. Hence, they are often called “third culture kids.” John and Ruth Hill Useem came up with the phrase. How do we get the three cultures?

1st Culture	2nd Culture	3rd Culture
Parent’s home culture.	The host culture where the family lived or lives.	Shared lifestyle of the expatriate community becomes the “culture within the culture.”

Missionary kids grow up in a “culture within a culture,” living between worlds. Missionaries can relate to that too. We forge friendships in the missionary or expatriate community—not based on religious convictions, but many times merely because we come from the same location and share common experiences.

At times, we feel we are foreigners in our home culture (where we came from), and aliens in the one to which we are sent. The writer of Hebrews understood this well; and our God understands too.