

Hello good sir and or lady!

When I was asked to write a letter to returning students about my own experiences returning home my first thought was "Oh man this will be really REALLY easy!" However, as I sit down to write this, I realized this is going to be a lot harder than I originally thought. Anyways here's my best attempt.

First things first on behalf of the creator of the universe I just want to say that I'm proud of you. What you did was hard, challenging, and requires huge amounts of faith and I don't think most people can really relate to it. I've done the transition home thing three times myself and know firsthand how challenging it can be. I know this could be your first or sixth time going through this but either way I hope to encourage you.

I've always been that person that feels forgotten, with friends, family, leadership you name it, I've always had this sneaking suspicion that no one really cares about me. Heck, I could point out time after time in my life where I felt like I had to travel a hard road all by myself. I know that this isn't the reason I originally went on RS but I remember thinking that maybe two months out of the country would make people care more about me. Absence makes the heart grow fonder ya know? However, to my disappointment it didn't. My first summer I think that most people cared but still I felt like only a handful of people really cared. My last trip it felt as though within a week, maybe even shorter, life had returned to normal. A lot of people didn't even ask me the most rudimentary questions about this huge life shaping experience. I'm not proud to admit that within a month, old sin patterns started to arise in my life, I felt depressed, lonely, and missed my missions trip family. To top it all off I felt as though my mission's family themselves had moved on to greater things, and had themselves adjusted efficiently and effectively back into society. All of this only made me feel lonelier. I remember one day specifically at work where I kept repeating to myself "I really did leave the country for the kingdom, that did happen" simply because it felt so fake and distant from where I stood now.

I really REALLY hope that this isn't your story. I hope that your family and friends deeply care about the relationships and experiences that you had which shaped you over the summer. I'm really hoping that the most trouble you have right now is accidentally raising hand when you see someone else's hand go up (We have all done it! 😊). But if that isn't you, if you feel alone, abandoned by God, forgotten by family and distant from your friends then this letter is (hopefully) going to rock your world. I've been right there with you and honestly there are some days I'm still right there with you. But these feelings are lies and God's truth is that he moved in your life and will again.

Think on this. You, you absolutely incredible (or quite possibly crazy) person followed God's call in your life, a call which took you out of your comfort zone and across the world to share his unconditional love with a group of strangers who you now firmly consider family. Friends may forget, family may forget, you might even forget what you did over this summer but God never will. Your returning home isn't the end of this incredible adventure either, it's simply the start of a new one, an adventure that might be working to improve yourself, working to share the gospel in your community, or even simply resting in His love. God has got some crazy plans for you, just trust him and continue to be his royal servant wherever the wind takes you.

I'm proud of who you are, what you did, and what you will become,

Dylan Cernoia