

Friendships Can Be Complicated

By **DENISE BECK**

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Friendship on any given day is a challenge. Throw some cross-cultural borders in there, maybe a few time zones, and any of us may just want to give up. But what a tragedy that would be.

Women make up nearly 70% of missionaries on the field and a recent research survey indicates that the number two reason global workers state that they *stay* on the field is because of friendship.¹

There are unique challenges that global workers face when it comes to developing meaningful friendships.

1. **Time.** The hassles of things like getting and preparing food, paying bills, and getting things repaired all take longer. Add homeschooling in the mix for some and the day is done. Making time for ministry takes priority and missionaries may feel guilty using that time to grow friendships.
2. **Mobility.** Changing your residence twice every five years is built into missionary life. You are on the field for X years, home assignment for X months. While on home assignment you are constantly on the move. While you are in your host country all of your expat friends are constantly coming and going as well. It is hard to want to invest in friendships when you know they won't be long term.
3. **Expectations.** During all of the years of preparation to go to the field, we unknowingly collect quite a large bag of expectations. In our dreams we are laughing with our team around a table. The work is hard, but we are closer because we weather it together. We may be prepared to be disappointed by the friends we left back in our passport country who increasingly cannot connect with the life we are living, but the shock comes when we are super hurt and let down by our fellow missionaries. We expect them to know

and understand our needs because we live in the same culture with the same challenges.

The longevity and flourishing of global workers would improve if they understood two things about friendships.

#1—God values community and developing friendships, even expat ones, and doing so is *not* a waste of time. You may be surprised at how many women feel guilty about the coffee shop dates with expat women, feeling that they are only fulfilling their call if their friends are locals.

#2—Your friendships will change and what you need from those friends will change as soon as you become an expat. It would greatly benefit all women preparing to serve cross-culturally if they knew about the five boxes of friendships they were getting ready to open.

- Friendships in our passport country
- Friendships on our team
- Friendships with nationals
- Friendships with expats
- Friendships with supporters and online acquaintances

Each of these friendships has different blessings and challenges. Being prepared to know what you can and can't expect from each group can save you a lot of grief around unmet expectations as you transition to a life of cross-cultural service.

In the Velvet Ashes Membership community, we are a group of cross-cultural women choosing to do life together and grow in friendship through resource and community. We go deeper into the practice of friendship through our monthly content, resources, and virtual events. Join us at grow.velvetashes.com. 

¹ Whiteman, G. (n.d.). *Resilient Missionary Study: Preliminary Findings*. Senduwiki.org.