

When the Mission Field Hits Closer to Home: Reflections From a Year of Serving as a Stay-At-Home Mom

by Ashley Johnson



Serving on domestic and foreign mission trips is not without its challenges. While serving in Costa Rica and Bolivia on medical mission trips, I found that often these trips require extensive advanced planning, collaboration with a team of healthcare professionals, and travel for a finite time period to serve unknown patients. Pharmacists may also be called to engage in “mission work” of a different capacity, one in which they alone are serving individuals with whom they are in close, life-long relationships with for an in-determinate time. This mission work may involve the caring of aging parents, terminally-ill family members or friends, or even raising children at home.

A little over a year ago, my husband and I made the difficult decision to transition across the country from Florida to Washington State for my husband’s career and to be closer to family after the birth of our first child. This move meant saying goodbye to dear friends, students, and a career that I deeply loved and knew would not be available in the area where we were relocating. I remember seriously questioning God’s plans. After 7 years of college, 1 year of residency, and 2 years of teaching, pharmacy was a figurative home for me and the thought of it looking different was incomprehensible

at the time. After many prayers and late night conversations, I made the decision to stay at home with our daughter while we transitioned into our new home.

In reflecting back over the year, I have learned a few lessons and truths about myself along the way in temporarily leaving my career as a pharmacist in order to serve my family:

1. Training as a pharmacist has equipped me with a unique skill set that is valuable outside of the profession. My education has not only instilled me with a dense knowledge base in all things medication-related, but also has taught me the importance of thoughtful research and evaluation of literature to make an informed decision. My training also instilled in me the importance of goal-setting, establishing a routine schedule, and building relationships within my community. In light of full-disclosure, my initial tendency is to want to use my gifts to advance my career first and then use what is left-over in terms of time and energy to help others. However, in 1 Peter 4:10, it clearly indicates that God-given gifts –in other words, *all of them* –are to be used in return to serve others first and foremost.

2. Comparison gets me nowhere. While walking in this season of life, which feels isolating at times, I have been prone to examine what others including my family, colleagues, and friends have gained and what is lacking in my life. I have found when I let myself dwell on all the sacrifices I feel that I am making, it is easy to miss what I am gaining in the process. After a seemingly never-ending day of feeding, changing diapers, and soothing an unhappy baby, I admit there were times I was jealous that my husband “got to” go to work all day, as if it were a vacation. I am reminded in Jeremiah 29:11 that God has a plan for me and that plan is made especially for me and for my good (character development included).

3. There are many non-pharmacy things I am not good at. During my career hiatus, I have had the opportunity to develop new skills such as cooking... since it is probably not wise to feed my daughter only toast. With a change in my daily routine and availability, I was also able to be involved in different areas of service that I previously wouldn’t have been able to experience. With the intensity of schooling, residency, and the early years

of my career I lost focus on some important relationships because I was waist deep in pursuing my dreams. Now more than ever I realize that it is essential to invest in close relationships with friends and family and help others pursue their goals. It is easier said than done, but we all can dream!

4. I often seek the approval of others more than God. There is nothing quite like major life changes to make one examine one’s identity. I found it – or should I say, *still* find it – challenging to experience satisfaction and fulfillment when I do not earn the praise of others. Throughout this crazy journey I have been both humbled and amazed by God’s sovereignty, faithfulness, and grace: humbled that I ever thought my plans would be better than His, and amazed that He knew what I needed more than I did. Although I didn’t know it at the time, I needed to be permanently taken out of my comfort zone and have my agenda put in the backseat in order to grow deeper in my relationship with Christ and recognize the goodness around me.

Although the challenges and rewards of mission trips inside and outside the home differ, they both are instrumental in showing God’s love and transforming us through selfless service. I am now transitioning back to a fulltime pharmacy career and I walk forward with a different perspective on mission work, a tenderized heart that is more aware of the needs right around me, a renewed resolve to appreciate each season of life, and a somewhat better cook. †

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