

Dear Royal Servant,

Welcome home. Welcome back to the place you thought you missed while you were hauling a campsite across Europe, acclimating to the food and elevation of Nepal, icing an ankle turned during a one-sided Costa Rican soccer match, choking down your 500th Peanut Butter sandwich in the middle of an African plain, or waiting for a centuries-long Chinese train ride to end. And welcome to the strange sensation that you left home behind... in those places.

Welcome, friend, to the Dichotomy.

There's a good chance that you were prepared for this. You talked about it during the final weeks of your trip. You may have even experienced it in years past; back when you were a student or a Staff Discippler on your first summer trip with Reign Ministries. But there's a difference between understanding something in theory and having to walk through it in practice. You're in the thick of the latter now: torn between two worlds. Fortunately, you aren't the first.

Scripture is full of Seeming Contradictions. During His time on Earth, Jesus was both Fully God and Fully Man. He sustained the entirety of creation even as He surrendered Himself to death at the hands of humans whose authority could only be claimed because He allowed them to have it. His death brought about abiding life for all of us, confirmed in His Resurrection.

And you -- broken, battered, beautiful you -- have been called and equipped to join Him in the work of restoring a rebellious world from which you were rescued by His grace without negating His righteous judgement. You're part of His Kingdom, qualified for entrance in spite of your failures and regardless of your nationality.

You've been a dual citizen since you started following Christ. You're just more aware of it now.

So as you settle back into the rhythm of your "normal" life, it will be essential for you to focus on the example of Christ. The God-Man who lived in the rift between two worlds much more vastly separated than your native culture and the place where you labored in ministry this summer. Who asks you to join Him in an inverted Kingdom where the first is last, the poor are valued, the blind can see, and the humble are exalted.

If you're following Him, you're living in the Dichotomy. The already-but-not-yet. The frustrating ministry where our battle is against the unseen, our labor can accomplish nothing on its own, and our victories are measured against a standard we can hardly comprehend.

As your Brother in Christ, I encourage you to embrace the following Seeming Contradictions:

1) The Work Is Finished / The Work Continues

You accomplished something this Summer. Like Abram, you heard God's call to move and you answered it with little to no sense of your final destination. You had the privilege of laboring to spread the Gospel, and God may well have transformed you in the process. But He didn't stop at adding a few letters to Abraham's name, and He's likely not done with you or the people you served.

Until Jesus returns to establish His Eternal Kingdom, we're meant to continue in the work you did this summer. No matter where we are geographically. The fact that this work continues does not devalue your contribution, nor does your contribution represent the entirety of the work. I hope that you'll celebrate God's faithfulness in this season, and that your celebration will fuel the next stage of ministry. Be done with what's done and prepare for what's next.

2) God Uses His People / God Doesn't Need Help

Every time your team shared the Gospel this summer, you were deeply involved in God's work and completely unable to execute it. Only the Holy Spirit can turn a person "away from self" and put Christ "on the throne." In His sovereignty, God depends on us for nothing. And yet, we are privileged to be part of His Ministry of Reconciliation. There's a Holy Tension at play in ministry, and that should excite and free you to continue doing Kingdom Work.

You have the obligation to preach the Gospel, and the freedom of knowing that the outcome rests in hands much more capable than your own. Don't let your burden for sharing become a weight on your soul. Instead, allow it to accelerate your faith into meaningful action.

3) You Were Called to Labor / You Were Called to Rest

You've been red-lining on behalf of Jesus for the better part of two months. There's a strong chance that you're going to burn out if you haven't already. Sometimes, that happens because we rely on our own strength instead of God's. Other times, it's the result of poor spiritual posture. If God is always at work and doesn't need us (but invites us in), we can expect a bit of hurry-up-and-wait. Those "waiting" seasons aren't sin. But they aren't excused absences, either.

The tension between work and rest is the space in which prayer is most beautiful. In prayer, we rest while contributing to God's work. It's the only labor that restores us as we engage in it, and it's always the first step toward the things we more commonly think of as ministry. It took months of prayer and preparation to set up the weeks of tangible work you did this summer. Your

biggest challenge now is determining what comes next for you. Don't do that without prayer and rest, but don't hesitate to go when God prompts you either.

4) Community Needs You / You Need Community

You're going to miss your team and the vibrant, Christ-centered community you had with them. This summer, you experienced The Church as it was meant to operate. But your experience is not the Final Word on Community, and Community is not owed to you by The Church. It's a collective effort, and it only works when Christ is at the center of it.

Your small group, your friend circle, and an unlimited number of other social settings will not be the same as your Royal Servants Family. They won't raise their hands for silence. They might not open up as deeply in discussions. Some of the things you miss from this summer were specific to the Royal Servants setting. Others are things you can and should help to build. If you find yourself missing community, it may be time to create it. But you may also have to be patient in that process.

5) Growth Comes From The Word / Your Quiet Time Is Not God

Scripture is a full and perfect account of God's character, desires, and design. You simply cannot know Him and follow Him without studying it, cherishing it, and allowing it to shape you. Your time alone with Him is invaluable. It will transform your heart and renew your mind. You should absolutely cherish it. But you must not elevate it beyond God Himself, and you must not attempt to contain Him within it.

It can be hard to adjust to a schedule that doesn't include hours of time chiseled out for pre-planned Bible Studies, prayer, and discussions. I hope that you make time for study and prayer, and that you continue to hunger for Scripture every hour of every day. But you should also know that you don't gain or lose points with Jesus because you had to delay, cut short, or miss a Quiet Time. Every moment of time is His, not just the silent ones alone with a Bible. Memorize the word. Live it out. Pray without ceasing. But don't revere Quiet Time over God.

6) What You Have Is A Gift / Your Gifts Are Not Yours

The Lord has a way of revealing more about us as we serve Him. The more we step out in faith to obey His commands, the more we come to understand His design and our place within it. You very likely learned some incredible, impactful things about yourself on this trip. The Lord made use of your giftings to strengthen your team, our ministry partners, and His Kingdom. It's very important that you cling to those Truths and seek ways to live them out.

But you must also approach this summer as an investment that God made in you, not a personal achievement. We see in Scripture that He expects more from us as He gives more to us, and that our faithfulness with His blessings is an important factor in our development. Treasure the things you learned this summer, but know that they're just a starting point. God has much more to do, and the things He gave you and showed you this summer are going to grow in proportion to your willingness to use them for His glory rather than your own.

7) Your Summer Mattered / Eternity Dwarfs A Season

The unfortunate reality is that, as amazing as your summer was, very few people are really going to connect with and understand your experience. Your team probably talked about this idea during debriefing, but you're only starting to discover or remember how hard it is to notice that only your closest friends will listen to your travel stories for more than a few minutes. Sometimes, the miracles and growth God gives to you completely fail to inspire anyone else. The world's reaction to your testimony does not affect its value. Your summer mattered in ways that you may never understand.

I've found that the most valuable place for Royal Servants stories is a personal journal or blog. In that format, you can share your stories with people who are interested without weighing down every conversation for the next few months. Perhaps more importantly, you'll have a record of God's faithfulness in your own life within reach at any time. It's impossible to overstate the value of being able to go back and look at your own testimony. Perhaps more importantly, the practice of stepping back to record your experience helps you to maintain a more God-focused, eternal perspective. Your involvement in the Kingdom didn't end when you came home. It's not the only place that God is at work. You should see this summer as one chapter in an incredible novel that is still being written, and that idea should encourage you as you contemplate the breadth and power of our God and His redemptive work.

In conclusion...

Coming home from ministry can be hard, but it can always be rewarding. It is our pleasure to serve a God who defies the "natural order" of things. There will be countless other Seeming Contradictions in your personal walk with the Lord, and much more to say about each of the ones listed above. You have a lifetime to wrestle with and grow in your relationship to God. But that journey starts today. It begins in the Dichotomy.

Happy trails, Royal Servant.

Steven Jones