

WEEK 2: Where does mission happen?

Getting started

This week we are considering the geography of mission: where does it happen. As a visual aid, the group is invited to bring photographs of the town or village where you live and photographs of places overseas, perhaps somewhere exotic, you have been on holiday. What are the connections and differences that you have found between 'here' and 'there'?

View from Ghana

Steve and Vicky Ager, from Derby, said an eight-month placement with the Anglican Church in Ghana took them out of their comfort zone and gave them a fresh insight into world mission.

Their placement, in Cape Coast, was arranged through the *Experience Exchange Programme*, a programme run jointly by USPG and the Methodist Church to provide volunteers with an experience of the world church.

They were visiting a country where an estimated 69 per cent of the population are Christians.

'It's so refreshing that people talk about God so openly,' said Steve, an architectural technician who helped with teaching at a vocational skills centre. 'Many taxis have bible quotes on the back windscreen, and many shops and businesses have Christian references in their names, for example God's Grace Hair Salon, Pray Hard Provisions Store, and God is Good Welding.'

Steve added: 'Something I have gained on placement is a greater understanding of the struggles and difficulties faced by people in developing countries. Every day we in the west take for granted the fact that we have clean water, food to eat and electricity – but these things aren't necessarily easy to come by in Ghana.'

'I think it's important that everybody should try and understand more about different cultures and people of different faiths, something I certainly experienced while I was there.'

Vicky, an optometrist, was helping at an eye clinic. She said: 'I'm the kind of person who likes to know exactly what I am going to be doing and when – but that wasn't always the case in Ghana. I learned to accept that things can suddenly change direction at any time, and to expect the unexpected.'

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She added: 'Through my experience, I think I've gained the confidence that I can survive in unfamiliar situations and that I can be stretched by moving out of my comfort zone.'

'I volunteered because I feel privileged to have had such a comfortable life. I wanted to contribute to a community where everybody is not necessarily as fortunate as I have been.'

Discussion

- Share with the group a cross-cultural experience you have had in another country, whether as part of a mission programme or not. What was the main lesson you took away from the experience?
- Consider as a group how you might use these lessons to inform how we might carry out mission at home.

Using the Bible

John 4:6: 'Jacob's well was there, and Jesus tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.'

In biblical times, the well or spring was the essential focal point for the common life of a town or village. In the Old Testament it is often the place where God appears to a person – or where new relationships are forged (see, for example, Genesis 16:7; 24.11ff). This is also true in John 4. But the time is important – normally water was drawn early in the morning or in the evening when the day was cooler; the fact that this woman was fetching water at noon was a clear sign of her exclusion from normal social life.

1. What are the equivalents in our own society of the 'well' – places where people gather and where mission can happen?
2. How do you think the woman – an outsider in many respects – would have felt during this encounter? What changed for the woman so that she felt inspired to become an agent of mission?

Closing prayer

Jesus, wellspring of our life,
Offering your own thirst,
In order to quench our desires and longings,
Meet us at the centre points of our human existence,
Drawing all together in the flowing stream of your refreshing love.
Amen

For next week

Bring a photograph of yourself or your family.