

UPDATED EDITION

Serving with Eyes Wide Open

DOING SHORT-TERM MISSIONS

WITH CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

David A. Livermore



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Foreword

I've had the privilege of knowing about Dave Livermore and observing his dedication to cross-cultural ministry for more than a decade. As with many of the early devotees of short-term missions, especially trips involving young people, Dave's interest in and commitment to short-term missions started with a view that focused primarily on giving Western Christians a great cross-cultural experience to foster their own growth.

In the late twentieth century, churches across America (and other wealthier nations) jumped at this unprecedented opportunity created by the advent of long-haul travel to go, minister, and learn in a fascinating world of cultures and adventures. Short-term missions morphed from a primary avenue for missionary recruitment to a foundational way to provoke spiritual growth in the lives of the participants.

Thankfully, Dave did not stay locked in this "missions for the benefit of me" mind-set. His long-term dedication to listening to and learning from brothers and sisters in the non-Western world transformed his perspective into what is now a commitment to genuine cross-cultural relationships and effective partnerships with the church in the majority world.

I finally met Dave personally when he was well into this journey, and I deeply appreciated his willingness to be self-critical, to ask tough questions about some of our culturally insensitive assumptions,

and to practice what he preaches in this book. He has slowed down, put his passport on the shelf for a while, and asked questions about rethinking and reworking short-term missions.

This book is the result of his reflection and research. It will serve well any leader who is willing to ask questions about how short-term missions can best serve the global advancement of Christ's kingdom—and not just the experiential advancement of Christians who are wealthy enough to participate in global adventures.

Dave's global overviews, careful research, and practical tools combine his skills as a youth worker, missiologist, and anthropologist. Like a news reporter in the helicopter above the highway, Dave gives us the "skyway patrol" view of short-term missions. While we are celebrating the sheer volume of short-term missions traffic, Dave takes time to give us a sense of the road ahead. He warns us of the culturally insensitive potholes that could keep us from joining the mainstream of God's activity in the majority world. He gives voice to non-Western leaders so that we don't continue on the road to ineffectiveness. And he points us in a direction that will keep us from taking the wrong exit, a detour into our own cultural self-absorption caused by our failure to evaluate our basic assumptions and listen to our non-Western co-travelers.

Like Dave, I believe in short-term missions, and I encourage churches and ministries to get involved. But I also believe that our Western approach to short-term missions, behavior in relating to those from other cultures, and perspective on the purposes of short-term missions desperately need an overhaul and a reevaluation. *Serving with Eyes Wide Open: Doing Short-Term Missions with Cultural Intelligence* provokes this overhaul. Any leader who is willing to take time to reflect on where short-term missions fits in our Western contribution to global Christianity will find this book an essential resource.

Paul Borthwick, Development Associates International,
author of *A Mind for Missions*

Preface

Since the first edition of this book was released in 2006, I've sometimes been approached at Christian conferences by someone who says, "Hey—you're the guy who hates short-term missions, aren't you?"

It's not exactly the way I want to be known. And it's not really true. I don't hate short-term missions. But I understand why some have heard my critiques about short-term missions without also hearing me say that I think there's tremendous potential in short-term missions done well.

But what has surprised me far more is the way this book has been generously received by so many people. Many readers have said things like, "These were things I always wondered about but never really voiced." Or "This doesn't apply only to a short-term missions trip. I see the same things in how we interact with culturally diverse people at home."

Here's the deal. I don't hate short-term missions. I've been participating in short-term missions for more than twenty-five years—as a participant, a leader, and a researcher. And even to this day, I travel overseas several times a year to minister and teach in various places around the world. It's because I think short-term missions *can* be such a transformative experience for everyone involved that I've been motivated to examine the good and the bad of our North American endeavors.

The second edition of *Serving with Eyes Wide Open* includes the core of what was in the first edition: a wide-angled look at the realities of our twenty-first-century world, a focus on some conflicts between how many North Americans describe their short-term missions experiences and the perspective of the locals who receive them, and an introduction to cultural intelligence as a way to improve the ways we learn and serve.

The second edition also includes many additions and changes from the first one. I've updated the statistics and research as needed. And I've incorporated some of the things I've learned from additional reflection and interaction with people about this topic.

On the whole, I'm encouraged by the direction short-term missions is moving. Growing numbers of groups are working hard to develop reciprocal, honoring relationships with the communities and churches they visit. Orientation and even debrief sessions have come a long way. And there's a spirit driving the short-term missions movement that appears much more thoughtful than what I observed when I first began researching and talking about this fascinating phenomenon in the contemporary church.

We still have much more we can do. Not all groups are equal. There are compelling, missiologically sound pictures of short-term missions happening in countless churches and organizations. And there are still plenty of appalling examples of seemingly thoughtless, adventure-seeking groups.

I invite you to join with me in taking a careful look at the world in which we live and zooming in on how short-term missions can be a part of what God is doing for such a time as this.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I'm grateful to my friends scattered in places around the world who have confided in me the joys and challenges of interacting with the North American church, including me. One of my driving agendas in this book is to allow more North Americans to hear their voices.

Second, I'm grateful for the benefit of many conversations with readers of the first edition of this book. Your input provoked me to think deeper and at times differently about certain aspects of short-term missions. A growing number of researchers are now investigating this topic, and several ministry leaders are rising to the challenge to do short-term missions with cultural intelligence. It's one thing to write about these ideas. It's another thing to do something about it. Thank you to those who are actually improving short-term missions.

I have immense gratitude for my editor and friend, Bob Hosack, who took a chance on me a few years ago as an unproven author because of his shared interest in these concerns. He and the rest of the team at Baker continue to be wonderful publishing partners.

Most of all, I'm grateful for my precious daughters, Emily and Grace, and my soul mate and wife, Linda. Not only do they give me the space, inspiration, and encouragement to write, but they also embrace these ideals with me. I'm not worthy of you dear women!

Introduction

On a cool November evening in London, I was roaming the winding streets of Piccadilly Circus with my African friend Mark. This was Mark's first trip out of Africa. Experiencing the multisensory experience of the night scene in Piccadilly Circus with him is a memory I'll never forget. It was the perfect way to view a culture—Mark and I each coming from unique cultural vantage points. I'll also never forget our conversation that evening. We had just finished dinner and an orientation meeting with a group of American¹ youth pastors who had just arrived in Europe for a two-week tour during which they would conduct youth ministry training in several churches across Europe.

Mark said, "Dave, that group was just so American!"

"Wait a minute. You're talking to a full-blooded American!" I replied.

For the time being, he assured me, I was exempt from his tirade. "They didn't ask me a single question all night long," he continued. "They were loud and brash. And they have prepared for this trip just enough to make them dangerous."

Mark's first two accusations were nothing new to me. I had observed and heard those criticisms all too often about my culture. However, his concern about preparation making them dangerous intrigued me. I've spent the last several years moving in and out of

many different cultures. I've participated in and led dozens of short-term missions trips, and I've always made preparation and orientation nonnegotiable. Still, was Mark onto something? Could preparation actually *hinder* one's ability to be effective cross-culturally?

Cross-cultural encounters used to be reserved for an elite set of jet-setters who traversed the international date line like the rest of us moved from one county to the next. Today, however, cross-border interactions are an everyday part of our lives. The American pastors who joined us in London are among millions of North Americans who participate in short-term missions trips each year. Some estimate that as many as four million Americans take short-term missions trips out of the country annually, and North American churches now spend as much on short-term missions trips as on long-term missionaries.²

Add to the ever-growing mission trip industry the business travelers who hop between Montreal, London, Beijing, and Sydney all in a matter of days. International travel is at an all-time high. And you don't even have to travel outside your own town to encounter the phenomenon of people living on opposite sides of the world but linked in ways previously unimaginable. Sitting at home in St. Louis, you can play chess on the internet with someone in China.

Even in sleepy, Midwest cities like Grand Rapids, Michigan, where I live, cross-cultural encounters abound. Just this morning I stopped at the grocery store, where a Sudanese man who arrived here a few months ago bagged my items. A couple hours later, I made a phone call to my credit-card company and ended up being routed to a call center in New Delhi, India. At lunch I overheard the couple behind me at the restaurant talking about their trip to Capetown, South Africa, next week. When I returned to my office, I opened the internet browser on my computer. It defaults to BBC News, so I was immediately viewing images from Gaza, North Korea, England, Libya, and more—all accompanied by current updates! I have more up-to-date information on what's happening in Libya right now than on how my girls are doing at school today. Cross-cultural encounters are all around us.

Neither my parents nor my in-laws have ever had a passport. I don't expect they ever will. However, my girls are on their third editions. The vast majority of the students at the universities where I teach not only have passports but also have multiple stamps throughout them.

We've never had greater accessibility and opportunity to cross over cultural lines, whether in our own backyards or twelve time zones away. We're traveling as never before.

Sadly, however, our increased accessibility to the globe doesn't seem to have dwindled our colonialist³ tendencies. Much of the way we interact cross-culturally continues to be filled with an "our way is best" mentality. An awareness of the importance of cross-cultural sensitivity is certainly greater than a couple decades ago. However, a subtle sense among North Americans that we have the "right" culture and thus need to "convert" others to our ways still permeates much of our cross-cultural perspective and practice—whether it's work we're doing as part of a multinational corporation, a university study-abroad program, or a mission trip.

This book is an attempt to open our eyes to existing blind spots in global missions, specifically short-term missions. I want to change the way we *see* and therefore *do* short-term missions. My own cross-cultural work has often reflected the weaknesses described in this book, so I do not write as one who embodies the perfect approach to cross-cultural interaction. However, exposure to my own neocolonialism and that of others has transformed the way I interact cross-culturally. Just as important, it's altered my perspective of myself, of others, of the world, and of my faith.

That's what I desire through this book—that we pause long enough amid our life in a global village to see what we may have missed before. I want us to question our assumptions and hear the voices of locals who have received our mission trips, consulting, and training modules. I want us to be open to the idea that our overall perspective may need altering. And after sharing some of the hard-hitting perspective about where we need to realign our efforts, I promise a more solution-oriented, hopeful approach to short-term missions in the latter portion of the book.

This book applies to anyone who wants to be more effective cross-culturally—whether in preparing you for your upcoming mission trip or tour abroad, helping you relate to an immigrant at work, or enhancing the work you do overseas as part of your job. But *Serving with Eyes Wide Open* is particularly focused on those of us who engage in short-term missions—either at home or abroad. In addition to the

millions of North Americans going overseas on short-term missions trips, as many or more participate in cross-cultural projects at home in their own communities and nearby states. The material in this book applies to both international and domestic cross-cultural encounters.

The short-term missions movement has had huge buy-in from other developed nations as well, including places like the United Kingdom, Australia, South Korea, and Singapore. My own research has focused primarily on those of us from the United States, and in some cases Canada, who participate in cross-cultural mission work. However, my friends from other developed nations tell me that much of what's reported here also applies to their cross-cultural practice, though I can't begin to assume its relevance beyond my own context.

Due to the ever-growing number of people doing short-term missions work abroad, an increasing number of resources are available to assist in these endeavors. Some helpful works deal specifically with the logistics and planning of such trips. Other more technical and scholarly works take a strongly theoretical approach to intercultural practice, and still others offer a more devotional approach to short-term missions and its transformational impact on the participants. Many of these are worthwhile resources, some of which I've included in the appendix.

This book, while being informed by those other helpful resources, takes a different approach—specifically examining the perspectives and assumptions we bring into our cross-cultural practices. The biggest problems in short-term missions are not technical or administrative. The biggest challenges lie in communication, misunderstanding, personality conflict, poor leadership, and bad teamwork. All too often we try to respond to these challenges by attempting to change surface-level behaviors rather than getting at the assumptions and convictions behind our behaviors. We learn the dos and don'ts about how to act when we go somewhere, yet it seems to make little difference in how we actually interact cross-culturally. We come home with zealous descriptions of how we've changed, yet within a few weeks, our lives look pretty identical to how they looked before the trip.

Serving with Eyes Wide Open is an attempt to open our eyes and see what we might otherwise miss. It's my belief that as we do so we'll not only interact in more Christ-honoring ways but also come

away with a higher degree of lasting change in us and in the communities we visit.

Another priority of this book is to give voice to local church leaders from a variety of settings around the world. These brothers and sisters are on the receiving end of our short-term missions projects. Many of them are too gracious to explicitly state some of the things that emerged in the research behind this book. It's my hope that this project is one small step forward in listening to the global church, of which the North American church is now a small minority.

Finally, this book is unique in that it applies cultural intelligence, or CQ, to short-term missions. We all understand the idea of IQ—a measurement of how intellectually smart someone is. And in more recent years, psychologists have taught us about the importance of emotional intelligence, or EQ, a measurement of how well we're in tune with the emotions of ourselves and others. CQ simply draws upon some of the same ideas and research in measuring our ability to interact effectively across cultures.⁴

There are three parts to this book. Part 1 gives a wide-angle view on our twenty-first-century world and church. We live in a global village, and awareness of the pressing issues of our village is an important springboard for a discussion about cross-cultural encounters. In addition, the largest Christian communities today are in Africa and Latin America. We must understand the changing face of Christianity if we are to appropriately see what we're joining when we engage in missions cross-culturally. "Serving with eyes wide open" begins with a widened perspective on the realities of our twenty-first-century world.

Part 2 explores the conflicting perspectives on short-term missions between North Americans and the global church. It examines the assumptions that drive a great deal of our cross-cultural work. The primary source of the information in these chapters is my original research on short-term missions. For example, I studied the practice of North American pastors who went overseas for ten days to two weeks to train national pastors. The research compared the North American pastors' assessment of their cross-cultural training efforts with that of the local pastors who received the training. This, combined with research on short-term missions by others and me, and the literature of cross-cultural interactions as a whole, led to the six

areas of conflicting perspectives described in part 2. These realities permeate the assumptions of our short-term work.

Part 3 provides a framework for applying CQ to short-term missions. The material in this section helps us apply our widened perspective and actually *do* short-term missions more effectively. We don't have to try to master CQ before our next trip. Instead, we want to embark on a lifelong journey of using CQ to more effectively love God and love others—on our short-term missions trips and in our everyday lives back home.

It's an amazing privilege to interact with people from other cultures. The seven billion people around the world are so much like us yet very different. May this book enhance the way we reflect God's glory when encountering the diverse people with whom we share the world. We will grapple with some hard-hitting realities in the pages that follow, but I encourage you to persevere; that's not the end of the story. I have great hope for the opportunities that lie on the horizon as we increasingly become part of a transient, global church traveling from everywhere to everywhere. Open your eyes. There's much to see in the movement of short-term missions and, more importantly, the movement of God in the world at large. Thanks for embarking on this journey with me.

Looking through a Wide-Angle Lens

Globalization and the Church




We begin broadening our view by looking through a wide-angle lens at the twenty-first-century world. After surviving the Cold War, the nuclear arms race, two world wars, several genocide attempts, and numerous totalitarian regimes, we find ourselves well into a new century. North Americans in 1900 had a life expectancy of forty-seven, whereas today it's seventy-six. Our world has undergone immense change over the last century. The Christian church has been in a state of major transition as well—both local congregations and the church at large.

Widening our perspective on our world should be an ongoing process for all of us. The next two chapters present a few snapshots of our world—the world as a whole and the worldwide Christian church. Like any snapshot, these pictures give us only a glimpse into the realities behind the images. It's important to begin with a wide-angle view before focusing more specifically on short-term missions work. Join me on a quick tour around the world as we begin the journey toward serving with eyes wide open.

1

One World

Snapshots of the Globe

 On a recent visit to Seattle, I met my friend Tony for lunch. Tony lives in Mexico City, and we were both visiting Seattle at the same time. We met at an easy-to-find spot in Seattle's Chinatown and walked through the international district for a few minutes before ending up at a French café. We walked inside, and soon after we were seated, a Haitian woman came up to take our order. She suggested some English Breakfast tea with our entrées. As she took our order, a group of Japanese businessmen sat down at the table behind us. I looked at Tony and said, "Do you see what just happened? In a matter of three minutes, we've encountered Mexican, American, Chinese, French, Haitian, English, and Japanese cultures!" Tony and I launched into an interesting discussion about our globalized world. Experiencing a mosaic of cultures as Tony and I did that day used to be reserved for the jet-setting few who hung out in international airports. But the world is becoming increasingly smaller for all of us.

At the same time, Americans still fare poorly in our awareness of what's going on in the world. Our collective global consciousness is

pretty dismal, and many mainstream media outlets do little to help. Our family often hosts international guests in our home, and they're forever frustrated that they can't get more than a passing glimpse of world events from our major news shows. Becoming globally conscious doesn't come easily. It requires extra effort on our part.

We're all citizens of a global world, whether we realize it or not. Our journey into a widened perspective on global missions begins by looking at some of the predominant issues facing our twenty-first-century world. While by no means an exhaustive list, some of the most important issues facing us include the following snapshots.

Snapshot 1: Growing Population of the World

Every second, four babies are born. Four more babies were just born . . . and four more . . . and four more . . . and four more. It continues day after day after day, the population of the world growing at a rapid rate. More than twice as many people are born each day than die. All this adds up to a world population of more than seven billion people. Line us all up in single file around the world and we'd circle the globe more than 112 times. At this rate, we can expect a population of eight billion people by the year 2025.¹

Where do all these people live? Twenty percent live in China. Twenty percent live in India. Five percent live in the United States. Fifty-five percent live in the other nations of the world. Developing nations are growing rapidly while their industrialized neighbors remain relatively static. The seven billion of us are scattered throughout approximately two hundred nations, but there are more than five thousand identifiable ethnocultural groups in the world.²

Nearly half of the people in the world are children. Forty percent of the world's population is under the age of fifteen, while less than 20 percent of North Americans are under fifteen. Many of our global children have a dismal future. It's hard to grow up when you're poor, marginalized, and forgotten. Health services are few and far between for most children in the world.

My wife, Linda, and I have often struggled with whether our girls' school system, teachers, and the corresponding curricula are our best options for them. Meanwhile, over one billion children have *no* options

and *no* access to schools. The majority of schools that do exist in the world are poorly run and costly to attend.

Perspective. That's what we're after in this journey together. Open your eyes. Wider. Look around you. There have never been this many people alive in the world. Four more babies were just born, and four more . . .

Snapshot 2: Poverty versus Wealth

Many of our fellow citizens around the globe face desperate economic circumstances. This is a perspective I've continually tried to give my kids. One time shortly after dinner, Grace, who was five or six at the time, said, "Daddy, I'm hungry. I need a snack." Emily, her older sister, smirked at me, knowing this was the perfect opportunity for my soapbox speech. Right on cue I started in. "Gracie, how can you be hungry? We just finished a good dinner. Millions of children in the world won't get a meal like that all month—"

"Sorry, Daddy," Grace interrupted. "I mean, I *want* a snack."

This has become standing practice for us as a family. Whenever one of us says, "I need . . ." someone else chimes in and says, "Need or want?" My girls love it when they catch me saying, "I *need* coffee." We're working hard to remember that we're among the "haves" when so many in the world are among the "have nots." The point is not to be guilt-ridden, middle-class Christians. But we want to live with a spirit of generosity and be continually mindful of the chasm between the rich and the poor in our world. Read these statistics slowly and deliberately:

- Twenty percent of the people in the world live on one dollar a day.
- Another 20 percent live on two dollars a day.
- Twenty percent of us live on more than seventy dollars a day.
- The remaining 40 percent are somewhere in between.³

And how about this? The combined income of the 447 wealthiest people in the world is larger than the combined income of 50 percent of the world's population. Did you catch that? Four hundred and

forty-seven people have more money than the combined assets of 3.5 billion people in the world!⁴

Sisay, a character in Richard Dooling's riveting novel *White Man's Grave*, is a North American who has moved to Sierra Leone, where he has become fully immersed as a local. After five years away from the United States, Sisay describes the sickening experience he had going back for a brief visit to the United States:

I resolved to sit on my mother's front porch and soak up some American village life to remind myself of what I had left behind. It was Saturday. My mother's next-door neighbor, a well-groomed, weight-gifted, vertically challenged accountant named Dave, brought out a leaf blower, a lawn mower, a leaf grinder, a mulcher, an edger, and a weed trimmer. He worked all day, making a terrific racket, chopping, trimming, and spraying toxins on a small patch of ground, which produced absolutely no food, only grass. *The rest of the world spent the day standing in swamp water trying to grow a few mouthfuls of rice, while Dave sat on his porch with a cold beer admiring his chemical lawn.* Sickening? You bet. It was time to go back to Africa.⁵

This is more than well-written fiction; this is reality. Americans make up 5 percent of the world's population, but we consume 50 percent of the world's resources. Think about that. We consume half of the world's resources. The problem of hunger in the world is *not* the earth's inability to produce food for seven billion people; it's the inequitable distribution of food.

Ravi, a seven-year-old boy I met in Delhi, is among the 95 percent of the world's population that isn't American. Ravi works ten to twelve hours a day, seven days a week, shining shoes on the streets of Delhi. Ravi faces four years of bonded labor in order to pay back a thirty-five-dollar loan his parents took out for his sister's wedding. Ravi will spend the next four years paying off a debt that's less than what I spent on dinner out last night. The inequities continue:

- More than two billion children live in our world, half in poverty.
- One of every four children in the world has to work instead of going to school.
- Eight percent of people in the world own a car.

Perspective. Perspective on “need.” Perspective on “hunger.” Perspective on “money.” Do you feel as if you’re living paycheck to paycheck? You may well be, and my point is not to diminish the financial challenges facing many North Americans. But it’s all about perspective. It’s all about serving with eyes wide open.

Snapshot 3: Disease

If the above statistics are not enough to ruin your appetite, how about this? Thirty thousand people will die today from *preventable* diseases. More than three thousand Americans lost their lives on 9/11. Many of us remember where we were when we first heard the news that day. Three thousand lives were lost in a matter of hours. We pause each year on September 11 to remember the victims and their families, and we should.

Yet how many of us will remember where we were when we learned that thirty thousand people will die today from preventable diseases? It’s all too easy to read that, say, “Wow! That’s horrible,” and move on. Thirty thousand people will die today. More than two hundred thousand, the population of the city where I live, will die this week from preventable diseases.

A great many of the deaths today will occur because the victims couldn’t get basic medicines that I can buy over the counter at a local drug store. Many of those who die today will be children. In fact, a child dies of hunger every sixteen seconds. Just about every time I take a breath, another child dies of hunger.

- Forty percent of the people in the world lack basic sanitation facilities.
- Over one billion people have unsafe drinking water.⁶

Perspective. Perspective on the world in which we live. That’s where we’re headed with all this.

One of the worst diseases facing us is HIV/AIDS. AIDS threatens the social well-being of entire nations. Almost forty million people are infected with the virus, with another one hundred thousand infected daily. These numbers are expected to double by 2015.

We must dispel the notion that AIDS is simply just punishment upon those who are sexually promiscuous. The number one way children in Mozambique contract the HIV virus is by sharpening their pencils with their fathers' razor blades.⁷

In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the pastorate has become a "burial business." Pastors bury AIDS victims daily, while teenagers and grandparents figure out how to lead households in which both parents have died. Over fifteen million children under the age of fifteen have lost one or both parents to AIDS, and that figure is expected to double by the year 2015.⁸

The next wave of the pandemic is expected to be in India, China, and Russia, home to almost one-third of the world's population. We are at the *beginning* of this crisis, not the end. This is a century-long struggle.

Of the seven billion people in the world, 40 percent live on two dollars or less a day. AIDS is eliminating entire generations in some communities. All the numbers can become overwhelming—even numbing—but we must gain perspective on the world in which we live. Let's open our eyes in order to improve the way we serve.

Snapshot 4: Refugees

Too many people on our planet are being forced out of their homes and communities. There's been a dramatic increase in the number of refugees over the last thirty years. In 1975, 2.5 million people were known to be refugees. Today more than 12 million people have been forced out of their native countries. Another 24 million people have fled conflict and persecution and are internally displaced within their own countries. The vast majority of refugees are women and children, and more than 65 percent are Muslim.⁹

As if being displaced from their homes and communities isn't enough, militia groups, rebels, and government leaders often take advantage of vulnerable refugees. Aid sent to refugees is often intercepted and hoarded by abusive leaders. Drugs intended to heal children are taken and sold, and food sent to families is enjoyed by warlords. Worst of all, refugees are abused physically and often killed simply to make a statement to other groups struggling for power.¹⁰

Sadly, young mothers such as Isatu Turay in Sierra Leone are not an anomaly in the twenty-first century. Isatu and her husband were living in a refugee camp in Sierra Leone along with their four young children. One morning heavily armed men entered their house and demanded all their possessions. The rebels became upset when Isatu and her husband had only thirty thousand *leones* (local currency) to give them. On the spot the rebels killed Isatu's younger sister, who was also living there, and brutally murdered Isatu's husband right before her eyes.

Isatu gathered her children and fled from the refugee camp into the bush, where she ran into another group of rebels who were lining people up and chopping off their hands. Isatu says, "I was praying heavily, and then my two-year-old daughter started to cry. They said the child was causing lots of noise for them. One of them took her from me while another dug a hole to bury her alive. I could not do anything, and my baby cried until she died."¹¹

Isatu's story speaks for itself. *Perspective*.

Snapshot 5: McWorld

Globalization is a broad term with many meanings, but the term is most often associated with the expansion of business and capitalism across national borders. Serving with eyes wide open includes gaining perspective on this growing reality in our world. Marketing products and services that have been profitable in developed nations and selling them overseas is often referred to as the McDonaldization of the world, or McWorld for short.

McDonald's is the epitome of McWorld. You can get the same french fries in Quito, Delhi, and Toronto. And the most universal product in the world is Coca-Cola. Or consider one of my addictions—Starbucks! You could be dropped into a Starbucks in Bangkok and have a hard time knowing whether you're in Bangkok, Seattle, Shanghai, or Sydney. The same drinks are available; the same font adorns the signage; and the chairs, lighting, color on the walls, and music are all strangely familiar. It's all part of the McWorld experience of Starbucks. Granted, even McDonald's, KFC, and Starbucks have some menu offerings that reflect local tastes and customs. But

on the whole, the experience at a McWorld business is much the same wherever you go.

When I travel, I love to eat in local establishments, and I thoroughly enjoy trying new foods. I have to admit, however, that sometimes I'm really happy to find a Starbucks where I can get my predictable, favorite drink. Yet I'm sometimes haunted by the implications of getting Indonesians to switch from tea to Frappuccinos, from sandals to Nikes, from oxen to SUVs, and from indigenous movies to Hollywood. This tension needs to be incorporated into our widened perspective on the twenty-first-century world.

For example, consider that on average North American companies make a 42-percent return on their China operations. Apparel workers in the United States make \$9.56 an hour. In El Salvador, apparel workers make \$1.65. In China, they make between 68 and 88 cents.¹² Christian businesspeople need to help us wrestle with these realities and consider the ethical issues involved and the accountability structures needed for individuals and organizations working cross-culturally.

There's a growing movement in the corporate arena described as "conscious capitalism." I'm excited about business professionals looking holistically at how to use business to respond to some of the pressing issues of our world. And I appreciate the economists and business leaders who are helping us grapple with the complexities of McWorld rather than simply saying it's all good or it's all bad. The realities of McWorld need to be included in our widened perspective.

In addition, McWorld is creating a virtual, global culture of sorts, especially among youth. A few years ago, a New York City-based ad agency videotaped rooms of teenagers in twenty-five different countries. The convergence of what was found in rooms from Los Angeles to Mexico City to Tokyo made it difficult to see any cultural differences. Basketballs sat next to soccer balls, and closets overflowed with an international, unisex uniform—baggy Levis or Diesel jeans, NBA jackets, and rugged shoes from Timberland or Dr. Martens. "In a world divided by trade wars and tribalism, teenagers, of all people, are the new unifying force. From the steamy playgrounds of Los Angeles to the stately boulevards of Singapore, kids show amazing similarities in taste, language, and attitude. . . . Propelled by mighty couriers like MTV, trends spread with sorceress speed. . . .

Teens almost everywhere buy a common gallery of products: Reebok sports shoes, Procter & Gamble Cover Girl makeup, Sega and Nintendo video games, Pepsi, etc.”¹³

We must not too quickly assume that globalization implies we’re moving toward a uniform, global culture. Cultural differences abound, and we’ll see that throughout this book. However, to a certain degree, globalization is shaping the lives of individuals from the urban centers of Shanghai to the remote villages of Madagascar.

McWorld has brought cross-cultural encounters into our daily lives. Working alongside refugees from Bosnia and Sudan, instant messaging people with similar interests across twenty-four time zones, and working in organizations that assume a global presence are just a few ways we encounter globalization.

Snapshot 6: Fundamentalism versus Pluralism

While seemingly more philosophical, this last snapshot is as important to our perspective on the world as the others. On the one hand, there is a growing movement of fundamentalists in today’s world who declare, “There is *one* right way to view the world, and it’s our way.” Simultaneously, a growing number of pluralists say, “There’s *no* one right way to view the world. Develop your own view. Just don’t force it on me.”

The clash of fundamentalism versus pluralism is at the center of most of our contemporary conflicts and wars. A world coming together culturally and commercially is simultaneously becoming more and more divided religiously and ethnically. In the 1990s, words like *jihad* and *al-Qaeda* were unfamiliar to most North Americans. Now they’re part of our everyday vocabulary. Watching news reports of fourteen-year-old boys in Afghanistan skipping along with AK-47s strapped over their shoulders has almost become ho-hum to us. Yet many Americans are still confused as to why the terrorists hate us so much. In relation to suicide bombers, we ask, “What’s wrong with those people that they’d kill themselves in order to dominate innocent people?”

If anyone should understand the conviction and passion driving the terrorist movements around the world, it’s Christians. Jihad, in

its mildest form, is a kind of Islamic zeal held by people committed to proselytizing the world no matter what it takes. Of course, it becomes extreme when it gets expressed through bloody holy war on behalf of religious conviction—just as the Crusades were a case of “Christian evangelism gone bad.” As a concept, however, fundamentalist fervor is as familiar to Christians, Hindus, Arabs, and Germans as it is to Muslims.¹⁴ Jihad, an Islamic expression of fundamentalism, is simply the absolute confidence in the truth of one’s position.

In contrast, pluralism attempts to eliminate the dominance of any one religion or viewpoint. It assumes that multiple and conflicting opinions and philosophies should exist and, further, should be regarded as equals. This kind of pluralistic philosophy permeates the story lines of movies, songs, and books distributed through globalization. Globalization is typically seen as an expression and agent of pluralism. Yet globalization also seems to be based on an essential value held by radical fundamentalists—the core value of domination. Bringing the world a uniform offering of products, services, and entertainment options is assumed to be good for all.

The coexistence of passionate pluralists with ruthless fundamentalists will continue to create tensions worthy of our attention. Such tension is faced by the worldwide community of Christians as well. Lamin Sanneh, a Gambian Christian scholar, says, “Northern, liberal Christianity has become a ‘do-as-you-please’ religion, deeply accommodated to the post-Christian values of the secular northlands. The new Christianity of the global south and east [e.g., Africa, Latin America, India], which bears the scars of hardship and persecution, will clash increasingly with its urbane and worldly northern counterpart.”¹⁵ We’ll further explore the realities of the Christian church in the twenty-first century in the next chapter.

Concluding Thoughts

These snapshots are an initial step toward helping us open our eyes. The statistics, inequities, and sheer enormity of global issues facing our generation can be mind-numbing. What can I possibly do about the fact that one in thirty-seven hundred American women die in childbirth, whereas one in sixteen sub-Saharan African women die in childbirth?

I'm not interested in putting you on an overwhelming guilt trip. Guilt and shame do little to change these realities. But I do want to bring perspective to how we live our lives and think about the circumstances of many of the people we'll encounter on our short-term missions experiences. Perspective and awareness alone are not enough. But they are an essential starting point for serving with eyes wide open.