

Written by a Missionary Friend. Thought you might be encouraged by reading this during the pandemic time – and maybe have a different appreciation for where we are and pray and think of our missionaries who face this every day.

In what ways do “Current Covid Social Distancing Living”(CSDL) and “Missionary Daily Living”(MDL) look similar? I want to share with you some similarities we have experienced:

1. Food – Much like the current situation where shopping is seldom and sparse, that is true of MDL. While in the village we would stock up on groceries every 4-6 weeks when we could get to the town a few hours drive away. Often the shops and markets were out of things we planned to get, and we had to go to several different small shops to find what we needed. There were no restaurants near home to eat out at, no fast food, or drive thru's, or deliveries. I made things from scratch I had never done before, like yogurt and granola and bread and tortilla shells and cheese and the list goes on. We had to always be creative and make do with what we had on hand. So although going to the local Super Walmart every two weeks with my mask on, and taking forever to self check out with my overflowing cart is not my favorite thing... I am thankful for that huge store that has so much, and is close by, and allows me to feed my family without much difficulty.
2. School – This online school situation is not ideal is it? It is hard work for parents and teachers and kids to miss out on many of the fun and engaging aspects of school and friendships. We homeschooled our kids overseas for years, and it was good. But we didn't do it because we were homeschoolers at heart, we did it because we didn't have another choice. It was either homeschool or no school. So we homeschooled. Our kids had a good education and we are thankful for those years together with them. But many who are now helping their kids work thru online classes at school know it is hard, and exhausting, and not especially glamorous. I am thankful that we in the West have these options and abilities to school our kids. At this time, so many kids in the world just have school on hold, as they wait to see if this year will count for them at all. Without access to the internet, or computers, or maybe even electricity, online or homeschooling is not a choice in many countries. They can only hope that they don't need to repeat the grade next year, but the reality is that many of them likely will.
3. Working from home – While many of you normally leave home in the morning to head off to work, that has not been our reality for most of our marriage. My husband has often had an office in the house where he had men come in to work with him, or he would at least spend some of the day working from home. My work was not only to teach our kids, and cook every meal, and keep the house, and care for guests and visitors but to learn a new language and culture and be involved in the programs and activities that were going on. It was a lot, honestly too much. A lot of work, a lot of “togetherness”, a lot of stress, a lot of feeling overwhelmed, a lot of overlap that was at times almost paralyzing to me. And now I am seeing posts on FB and such about this same dynamic, as many parents are struggling to find the balance of how to work from home, with kids, and schooling, and family life and all that goes into a day. It is a lot... Let's be honest, it really is too much, and it can feel totally overwhelming. I constantly struggled with finding my joy and sufficiency in not just what I DO and accomplish, but in who I am was created to BE as a child of God. I pray that you will realize how loved you are by your father, and that you are ENOUGH....just as you are.

4. Family and Friends – Many are struggling now with not seeing relatives, family, friends for some weeks or months and feeling disconnected from others. This is a hard one, and this one we know well. This last term we were in Africa for four years without returning to America. Other times we have been three or two years before seeing family. It is hard, really hard. Honestly I think it is the hardest part of MDL for me. Grandparents died, nieces, and nephews were born, graduations, marriages, parties, get togethers, celebrations all happening and we missed it. We have missed a lot. And the longer we are gone from sight, the more the space that we occupied is filled in with other people and other relationships. So that even when we do return, our “spot” is not the same as it was before, and in some cases it is completely gone. The losses are deep and real and the sadness is genuine. In the process we hold close those we love and do the best we can to show others that we love them. We call (or try to if we have reception), send letters and pictures, we send packages, and videos and wait patiently for the time we will be together again.
5. Church – How many of you are loving sitting in your PJ’s in the living room on Sunday morning as you watch church online? There is something fun about it I think, but we also believe it is only for a time and that one day in the near future, we will be able to walk into church again, and see our friends and give hugs all around and worship and study God’s word together face to face. For many years Sunday was a hard day for our family. At the beginning we met together with our partners to pray and sing together. But sometimes it was just our family, sitting around our living room. There was nothing online to watch as we didn’t have internet access at the house and so we just sat and talked and prayed with our kids. This was our norm. It was not a happy social event, or a time to gather with friends, or a time to listen to the awesome praise band. It was just a time set aside to remember the God we love. Our expectations of what church should “be” and “do for us” are often misplaced, and the grassroots baseline of gathering to be with God is easily lost in all the noise.
6. Health – The scare of this virus is legitimate and real. As Americans we have the expectation of good and reliable health care. We assume that the ER is open and that doctors will be there when we need them. We have confidence that the pharmacy will have stocked the medication we need and that we will have the money we need to buy them. Medical issues in another country have been a scare for us. Missionaries to Africa used to pack their possessions in coffins when they went over on the ships, as they knew their life expectancy was short. How depressing would that be, to pack for a trip in a coffin! The countries we have lived in and visited do not have good medical care. We have been scared multiple times that one in our family would die, as we faced asthma, infections, multiple bee stings, appendix infection, snakes, poisonous plants, kids falling from trees, as well as typhoid, malaria and other unknown sicknesses. We didn’t have great doctors, the pharmacy was hit or miss, and it was often safer to stay out of the hospital than to go in. Health scares are a big deal, especially with little kids. But God provided for us again and again, in crazy ways that would take too long to write out. We needed to have faith that God’s love for our kids exceeded our love for them, no matter what the outcome of that would be.

7. Clothes and Beauty – Haircuts at the salon, pedicures, massages, new clothes, shoes, dressing up, feeling all waxed up and ready to go... Those are things that some are missing during these stay at home days, when all the places that help with these extras are shut down. I could try and say that those things are for “others” but let me be truthful, a pedicure, a hair trim and a massage would be pretty amazing right about now!! We didn’t have those things for years, hair cuts were all home cuts and any other salon functions were a distant memory. New clothes are hard to come by in the village, and we wore things until they died and then some. Learning to do without and figure things out with what we had at home served us well then, and continues on to today. I am thankful that I learned to cut hair while practicing on my unsuspecting college friends....thanks guys!

8. Feeling alone – This is a harder one to clearly identify, but we all know when we feel it. That feeling that you are the only one. That no one understands your exact situation and that you are honestly alone. During this time of CSDL, we can’t go out to lunch with friends, or meet up in the park. We can’t go over to dinner at our parents, or see our friends at school. Living overseas I felt alone most of the time. Now, to be honest, I was rarely physically alone, there were always people around in a village, often more that I wanted! But I felt alone inside. I felt like no one really knew what was going on or knew me. For my Western friends and family, our life was so odd and different, and so few came to visit us to find out what it was truly like. And my West African friends welcomed me into their lives and homes openly which is beautiful. But they didn’t really try to understand me, or what I really liked or cared about. I was so different from their world and norm, they didn’t even know where to start to identify with me. And I felt so very much alone. I really am sure that without Christ and the truths of his love and care for me I would not have been able to stay. The aloneness would have been too much. I am so thankful to serve a God who cares not just for the world... but for me.

I share these things with you today, to ask you to pray. As you struggle through these days and times, pray for your family, your friends and others who are struggling with you. And in the coming weeks or months as restrictions lift and you begin to go back to your “normal life”, pray for the missionaries you know and love around the world as they continue to live their daily life... which looks a good bit like the social distancing isolation life that you were so happy to leave. They aren’t forced to live in it, they choose it... But it doesn’t mean it isn’t hard. They need grace and strength to get up each morning and keep walking in it, for the sake of Christ.

We have hanging in our home a sign that says “There is ALWAYS something to be thankful for”. I pray that today you would be able to look and see God at work around you, and that you would give thanks. We serve and worship a great God.