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Explorers and Immigrants

Abstract

"In my research work I am regularly able to live life on the frontier of an unfamiliar land, as an immigrant and an explorer. Day-in and day-out I get to experience the unfamiliarity which is so rewarding and exciting, satisfying the insatiable appetite to do something daring."

Posting about new ways of thinking from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/explorers-and-immigrants/>

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Comments

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Explorers and Immigrants

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Nathan Tittle

We had seen God in His splendors, heard the text that Nature renders. We had reached the naked soul of man. – Ernest Shackleton, Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage.

I think that there is something innately daring in most people. For thousands of years people have packed up their belongings, left families, comforts, and familiarity behind, and headed for the frontier. Abraham packed up his possessions and headed for Canaan. Mary and Joseph took their toddler and headed to Egypt. Magellan, Columbus, Shackleton, and so many more explored places where none of their peers had ever been. The Pilgrims packed up and got on three ships bound for the New World, beginning wave after wave of migrations of immigrants to the United States.

Virtually everyone in the United States reading this article can point to brave and daring forebearers who followed this same path. To this day, immigrants continue to leave their homelands in Central America, the Middle East, and Africa in search of a better place in the United States or Europe.

Explorers and immigrants are on an adventure like no other. Leaving behind the trappings of familiarity, they are willing to endure countless hardships as their entire way of living is upturned – vocational changes, language changes, lifestyle changes, cultural changes — the only thing that is familiar now is the feeling of unfamiliarity. And, arguably, they are learning more and seeing more of God in the process than they ever could have in their familiar surroundings.

While the reasons for such an exodus are many, these immigrants are daring in a way that most people living in the comfortable trappings of the Western World don't get to experience every day. At least not permanently. Yes, we travel to far-off lands for unique experiences, knowing that we'll soon return to our comfortable homes. Or, we go to a new restaurant and try a new food, knowing we can have comfortable, well-known food at home tomorrow. But, lurking beneath the surface of familiarity in our Western world is a wildness aching to be challenged, pushed into new frontiers and out of our comfortable, well-trodden boxes. A wildness put into our soul by God in order to understand Him better.

I love the thrill of physical, external adventures like climbing mountains, travelling to new places, and eating new foods. While these externalized adventures are certainly things I look forward to, they are far from the norm. How do we find adventure day-in and day-out? How do we challenge familiarity in the otherwise mundane details of daily life? Is this only for the immigrants? Only for the explorers? I don't believe it needs to be.

In my research work I am regularly able to live life on the frontier of an unfamiliar land, as an immigrant and an explorer. Day-in and day-out I get to experience the unfamiliarity which is so rewarding and exciting, satisfying the insatiable appetite to do something daring. As a researcher I am no different than the explorers of old who traveled to far-off lands, trying to discover new things, knowing there was a great chance they would fail miserably. It only took a small chance that they would see the world in a new way and discover something exciting to keep them going. I am no different than an immigrant following a God who is leading me on a new frontier where he can teach me who he really is. Following a God who, in the words of C.S. Lewis, is “not safe, but is good.” Relishing the opportunity to “touch the face of God.”

As a researcher I am continually able to lift up the rug of God's creation, which, while beautiful on the outside, is more intricate, complicated, and magnificent on the inside than we could have ever imagined. In some of my research, I am working with others to unravel our genetic code to have a better understanding of a variety of common diseases and human ailments. What a wonder it is to know that we are the first pioneers to tread over this new land of understanding – going forward and getting a clearer understanding of the world God has made. And, simultaneously, to get a better and deeper appreciation for how little we actually know. This is how I love God with my mind. Worshiping him through exploration. Worshiping him through understanding. Worshiping him by plowing new grounds. Worshiping him by following him where he leads.

One of my greatest privileges is the opportunity is to bring students with me on these worshipful explorations. In these settings, gone are the boring confines of rehearsed and well-traveled scripts, which instructors try to polish up to appear exciting, but often appear no more interesting than a garden path. Instead, we have mountains to climb. Mountains that have never been climbed before. Mountains that may not be climbable, but mountains that we will try to climb nonetheless.

There is an overly used, but still excellent, quote from Aristotle that says that 'the more you know, the more you know you don't know.' The life of the mind and scholarly work allows us to tread upon new territories, new ways of thinking – we can be pioneers following God's call to us through the way we view the world. And, if we do it well, we'll realize more and more just how awesome, how powerful, and how great is our God.