Do You Love Beans and Rice?

This month’s Serve was written by Nathan and Dawn Patefield, who serve in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

How can you prepare to serve the Lord in Latin America? Be ready to eat lots of beans and rice (at least in Brazil). Seriously, adapting to cultural norms, including everyday food, is one of the important ways to build bridges in your new country. But long before you arrive on the field, you should . . .

Be the kind of disciple now that you hope to see produced in ministry later. Paul encouraged Titus to be “a pattern of good works” (Titus 2:7). Develop solid
habits of listening to God in Bible study, obeying Him daily, and speaking to Him in prayer. These are foundational to any ministry.

Serve the Lord now in your local church. Serve in any area you can. Ask your pastor where you can serve, and be willing to try in areas where you don’t feel comfortable. On the mission field, you will often find yourself outside your comfort zone, but you just ask the Lord for help and do your best.

Read missionary biographies. God uses the examples of servants who have gone before us to challenge our hearts and teach us about missionary life. When we read missionary biographies or converse with missionaries we meet, we can get a head start on our on-field training.

Inform yourself about the country in which you hope to serve. Read their history, try to understand their culture. If you live where there is a nearby population of those from a Latin American culture, try to interact and learn firsthand about cultural differences. In Brazil, we learn early on that punctuality is not nearly so important to Brazilians as relationships. They are relaxed and very people-oriented. Friendships and family are more important than getting somewhere on time. People are more important than getting things done. That has ramifications for time-conscious Americans.
Visit a missionary for six weeks or more if you can. Go with the purpose of “shadowing” the missionary—doing what they do, eating what they eat, helping in any area you can. Going by yourself means the missionary family will not need to change their schedules and habits as they do when large groups come. This way you will gain a more accurate feel for life on the field.

Remember that you are going as an ambassador of Christ, not a teacher of American culture. Paul was prepared to give up his rights as a Roman citizen in order to better preach the Gospel (I Corinthians 9). Doing things in a different fashion than the “American way” doesn’t mean it’s wrong. For example, in Rio de Janeiro, it is considered good manners to greet and say goodbye to everyone at social events (church services, parties, etc.).

Serving the Lord in another country is a God-ordained adventure. Even after almost three decades in Brazil, we are still learning new words and still taking steps forward in understanding the culture of the people we love. And, yes, we even LOVE beans and rice!

Nathan and Dawn Patefield
Baptist Mid-Missions missionary serving in Brazil
Join us October 15 at 10:00 am Eastern Time for a Facebook Live event as Baptist Mid-Missions kicks off our yearlong 100th anniversary celebration!

Special features include a preview of our 2020 events given by BMM President Vernon Rosenau and key moments in BMM history told by President Emeritus Gary Anderson.