

On My Way to Israel—A Faith-Trip to the Holy Land

There are two suitcases on our son's bed upstairs. Come Saturday morning, they'll both have handles wrapped with airline tags reading "Tel Aviv."

The preacher and I have been planning this trip for months, but for some reason, I've been keeping this close to my chest. I keep thinking, *I need to tell my people about this*, but then I just haven't been able to.

Staging a trip to the holy land has consumed an entire room. His clothes and my clothes. What do we need in our carry-ons? Important documents need to be copied. Gifts are piling up for my cousin's daughter who is going to school over there, including S'mores, Pop Tarts and fruit chews from Costco. (Who knew she would find those to be a special treat when far from home?)

But the staging going on in my heart, through winter, summer and now fall, has been even more consuming.

Israel.

What does a little Wyoming girl turned pastor's wife in Montana know about Israel?

We're going with a group from church for a Bible-based study tour of the country. "You'll be so moved by seeing the places Jesus' saw," they tell me. "You'll walk where Jesus walked."

"Are you so excited?" they ask.

"Isn't Israel dangerous?" they ask.

So many questions, but this is too personal. *Walk where Jesus walked?* This isn't a vacation.

Costco has Christmas decorations out already, while I'm filling suitcases to go see Bethlehem. What does that do to my heart, and what can I possibly say to you, to describe what God is doing inside of me?

My Grandma Willenbrecht, a woman of energy packed into a four-foot-nine frame and dressed in pastels, loved to travel. But it was always the people she enjoyed. Her family letters would describe her encounters with the airline lady or the man who helped her with her luggage. Although I'm a little taller than she was, I carry the same passion for the stories of people.

I'm going to a place where an entire country is required to serve in the military after high school. Where AK-47s aren't strange outerwear. Where every home carries a story of Holocaust. Where there's an influx of immigration because of antisemitism around the globe.

Where the people haven't met their own Messiah.

This isn't a vacation.

"Are you so excited?" they say. I look at *Jerusalem* on our itinerary, and blood comes to mind. The blood of Jesus in exchange for my life.

"When He came near, He beheld the city and wept over it"
(Luke 9:41).

Excited?

How do I write down words to describe the weight on my heart at the thought of going to the headwaters of my faith?

I'm going to Israel.

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