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A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO
SHORT-TERM MISSIONS

BOB WIELENGA



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Thank you Rick for teaching a young college kid how to inspire others through practical service.

Thank you God for allowing me to have the experiences that I've had. Please use the words on the following pages to inspire others as they learn what it means to "go into all the world and make disciples" of You!

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Why You Should Listen to This Guy? **(A Letter from Bob)**

My story begins way back in the dark ages. Okay, it was really only 1980 but I've spent most of my life since then working with high school students and for them, anything longer than six years ago is ancient history. I had planned to graduate from high school and go on to college majoring in law so I could one day become governor of the great state of Michigan.

Then everything changed because of three weeks spent in the Dominican Republic. Hurricanes David and Frederick had wreaked havoc on the island and most of the Caribbean that year and a group of us were going to help rebuild homes. Seventy-nine of us lived together for 3 weeks and during that time rebuilt houses for 100 families. I came home with a rebuilt purpose in life and a strong desire to serve my Christian family around the world.

Now, almost thirty years later, I've had the privilege of introducing thousands to the world of missions, with hundreds answering the call to full-time Christian service. I've led short-term mission groups as small as

four team members and as large as 159. We've traveled together to all but one continent of the world and I get just as excited today by seeing the look on someone's face as they begin to experience how God chooses to use them to fulfill His plan for themselves and the world as I did myself back in 1980.

I hope you enjoy this book. It's intended to be a practical guide for you, the leader of a short-term missions experience. It can be read from cover to cover or you can jump from chapter to chapter using it as a reference guide prior to or during your trip. How you read it is up to you. My prayer is that God will use it and you in marvelous ways to promote His mission, His ministry, and His will in order that disciples of Him will be made throughout the world.

God bless you as you take on the greatest "job" you'll ever do. Work hard for He promises to reward the faithful.

Bob



Flexibility is Your Friend

Hoe Ball. You've never played it. I know that because a small group of students working with a Christian school in the mountains of Guatemala made it up. Their original task was to level a field that the school would begin using as a soccer field. The team was dropped at the school and asked to work alongside a couple of local professional dirt levelers. Shortly after arriving the interpreter determined he had somewhere else to be. But just prior to leaving he instructed the group to level the field by moving the high ground on the left to the low ground on the right.

After an entire day of dirt moving and dirt tamping the team returned to their base camp exhausted but happy the work had been completed. The next day they were asked to move the high ground on the right to the low ground on the left. It seems the ground was

only level when certain people were looking at it and, depending who showed up to express their opinion, determining just how level the ground really was.

Were they frustrated? Absolutely! Did they give thought to strangling the next person to show up and critique their work? Absolutely! Did they respond inappropriately? Not at all! They simply created Hoe Ball.

The rules are similar to baseball but instead of a baseball you use a soccer ball and instead of a bat you use the hoe you've been leveling ground with.

Ask any of the high school students who traveled on this team about the soccer field they had to level and they will begin by describing the hard earth, the frustration of working without an interpreter, the aggravation of having to do the same thing several times, and then they'll begin talking about Hoe Ball.

You see, Hoe Ball really did two things for this group. First, it took their minds off of the difficulties of the day and allowed them to focus on each other and another activity. The second thing it did was remind them that when life gets rough its time to start looking

for the good and the fun that surrounds us. So often when we focus on ourselves and our struggles we find ourselves rigidly holding fast to the very thing we dislike so much which causes anger to build up in our lives.

It's not about you, your team, or your plans. It's about God! If your desire is to have the greatest experience imaginable for humans then you will have to learn the art of flexibility. Trust me on this. Your team will always be better at this than you are. As the leader you need to constantly remind yourself that flexibility is your best friend in trying situations.

Sounds simple doesn't it? Be flexible. But, throw in a several hundred or thousand mile journey, preconceived ideas of the accomplishments you want to achieve during the trip, cultural nuances that make no sense and your perfect world can come crashing to the ground with the end result being frustration, frustration, and frustration. So, take a breath, predict in advance that something will change your plans, welcome that change and practice being flexible. If you do that...you will do more than just survive a trip, you will thrive during it.

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2

Expectations are Your Enemy

A group of adults were traveling from Michigan to Guatemala and the flight they were on connected through Atlanta, Georgia. In the air between Atlanta and Guatemala City the plane banked hard to the left and continued turning until they were headed back to Atlanta.

The explanation from the pilot was that the workers at the airport in Guatemala City had just gone on strike and the airport had been closed. As there was no word as to when the airport would be open they were choosing to return to Atlanta.

The group hung out in Atlanta for almost a day working with the airlines trying to figure a way into Guatemala when they determined that they would fly into El Salvador and rent a bus that would take them into the country that way.

Arriving at the mission site 30 hours late, tired, and wishing they'd had a shower, they immediately sat down for dinner with the orphans they had come to help. This suddenly placed everything into perspective for them. A small mix-up with the airlines and little inconvenience during travel was nothing when compared to everyday life as an orphan growing up in a developing country.

Prior to every trip I have ever led I always gather the group together and tell them this, "Expectations are your enemy." Today we plan to drive together to the airport and board a plane to some other country. Once there we plan to assist the ministry in anyway that we can to help them spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a needy world.

However, I can't guarantee that this is what is going to happen. We may or may not make it to the airport. We may or may not arrive in the country we are planning to travel to. We may or may not work on the project that we've all been planning on. We may or may not stay at the location we all hope we will.

The one thing we do know for certain is that God knows where we will be and what He needs to have

done there. Today we are stepping out to do His will for our lives, not our own will.

Since expectations are your enemy, make sure you do some pre-trip analysis of your own expectations and help your group to do the same. By articulating those expectations on paper or verbally to one another your role is not to dismiss or criticize them but rather remind yourself and members of your group that God is ultimately in control of everything that has and will happen. By trusting Him when things change we acknowledge His sovereignty and humbly submit to what He wants to accomplish in your own life and the lives of each person on the trip.

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3

Insurance is NOT Optional

It was your typical construction project missions trip. One church after another had signed up to be a part of building the new two story housing complex for the children at the orphanage located 25 kilometers outside of Guatemala City. Members from churches across the United States would travel for a week or two at a time to assist by providing volunteer labor.

Within only a matter of months the basic structure was standing and all sorts of safety precautions were in place. As work finished up for the day, Rocky carefully stepped off the roof he had been working on and onto the top of the scaffolding that had been set up alongside the house. As he placed his weight on the top board, it shifted leaving nothing between himself and the rock hard ground some 30 feet below. Rocky's head and back took the brunt of the damage

as he hit the ground and the crew on the ground went into action at full speed.

Rocky was taken by ambulance to the local hospital where his scalp was stitched back together, and he was diagnosed with massive internal bleeding and several broken bones. Not a pleasant position to be in even in the United States, let alone a hospital in the midst of a developing country. Rocky needed to get home.

Medical evacuation from a foreign country is expensive. The team had not planned in advance for such an emergency so credit cards were collected and by using a half dozen cards the group was able to cover the \$28,000 cost of getting Rocky back to his home town. Next came the task of paying off the credit cards. Many fundraisers and donations later the debt continued to stay with the group. One generous donor donated a piece of property and the church proceeded to build a house on the lot. This house constructed over time primarily with volunteer labor was eventually sold and the proceeds used to pay off the debt.

God did indeed provide through His people and everything did work out well for Rocky. Today he is healed from the injuries and is a testimony of God's graciousness. However, the extra work of the team could have been avoided.

Short-term travel insurance that covers everything from delayed travel and lost baggage, inadvertent hotel expenses due to rerouted and cancelled flights, on-site medical expenses, and even medical evacuations is extremely inexpensive considering the peace of mind that comes with it.

Most colleges and universities specializing in these same types of trips or study abroad programs mandate this type of insurance for their students. Likewise, I won't travel with a group without purchasing some emergency insurance for everyone. There are a variety of insurance companies that can be found on the internet that can supply this vital tool for your trip and in most cases it will cost \$30 or less per person for groups traveling for a month or less.

I would recommend that you visit our website at wwwSimplyMissions.org for links to some of these insurance carriers.

On a very practical note, I realize that one of the most daunting tasks when developing a trip is the budget. I am always mindful of how much the cost of the trip is growing and constantly working on ways to cut costs, as much of the money will be raised by donations.

Insurance always seems to be one of those corners we like to cut. Eliminating the budget line for short-term travel insurance is definitely NOT the budget cut consideration you should EVER consider. If you must trim your budget look for ways to “simplify” your experience.

Too many short term mission trips include extravagant perks (side trips, restaurant meals, etc.) that in retrospect are far less meaningful to the individuals you will be taking on the trip than the actual work and ministry they will engage in with the local people.

4

Where's Walmart When You Need It?

A small church and school stood on the hillside of Haiti. Each year during the rainy season the water and dirt came flowing down the mountainside threatening to erode the ground upon which the buildings stood.

The best solution to this problem appeared to be a short concrete wall that would divert the landslide thereby saving the ground around and under the various buildings.

With bags of cement on their backs the team hiked up the mountain trail from the nearest road and prepared to build a wall. The first question I was asked was, "Okay we have cement, sand, and water. Where did they stack the blocks that we'll use to build the wall?"

My reply was simple, “There are no blocks. We’re going to build the wall out of boulders.” “Where do we get boulders from?”

“Look around!” Sure enough, the team spent the next couple of days scouring the mountainside in search of rocks and boulders that could be moved and used in the wall.

Necessity is the mother of invention. In America we have come to expect that just about anything can be bought somewhere at any hour of the day or night. The rest of the world operates much differently however.

Need wood for a building? You’d better order it several weeks in advance if you want it to be there when you need it. In most of the developing world, wood is cut upon demand. That means that after you order the wood, a tree is cut down, the lumber is extracted from the trunk, and the delivery is made.

It’s roughly cut, rarely straight, and extremely wet green wood. It will most likely be nothing compared to the kiln dried lumber you’re used to at your local lumber yard. And, don’t assume you will be using

power tools for your construction project. Electricity is an expensive luxury that much of the developed world has little of. In such places you can expect that much of the labor needed to complete your project will be manual labor.

Plan ahead and be prepared to be creative. Seldom will a project go the way you planned it to go. How you react will determine how your team reacts. Much damage has been done in the name of missions by leaders who failed to plan and then reacted negatively toward a people and their culture. Sensitivity is more than a buzz-word. It comes from proper expectations and a large amount of flexibility. Read chapters 2 and 3 again if you need to.

So be prepared. As you plan for your trip make a list of EVERYTHING you will need. Let me say that again, EVERYTHING! Share your list with someone on the ground in the country you will be working in.

Find out what can be purchased there, its cost, time frame for delivery, etc. It may be cheaper and necessary for you to pack your own tools, nails, etc and take them with you.

In many developing countries tools we take for granted are a valuable commodity and expensive. When you are done using the tools and ready to return home you can prayerfully consider leaving the tools behind and asking God who He would like you to give them to. When you do this you might very well be providing someone with more than just some tools. You'll be providing them with a livelihood.

5

Accidental vs. Intentional Ministry

Missions. You've convinced yourself over the years that this is the process of you leaving your area of comfort and changing the lives of less fortunate people. Missions is about introducing people to Jesus Christ and helping them to understand fully who He is and how He desires to interact with their lives.

Short-term missions is far more about your team than about any people or people group you may ever visit. The best opportunity you have to influence people is through the process of building relationships. The team you are bringing with you is the group you have a relationship with. Influence them. In the process, you'll find that you will influence the world.

We travel half way across the world in an effort to make a difference. But the reality is that the ministry that happens with the people there is accidental. It's

great that something happens with them but what you do with your group is where real discipleship and even evangelism takes place.

You have an extremely rare and awesome opportunity to take people out of their comfort zone, get them away from the busyness of their own world and actually allow them to see how the God of the universe enjoys working in them and through them.

Not everyone gets that chance. If you are to make the most of it you need to be intentional. This is your opportunity to impact a life toward deeper commitment and discipleship of Jesus Christ. This is not a fun vacation for you and a group of your friends. It is, however, an opportunity for yourself and others to grow in love for each other through a common bond and mission of service to God.

Don't get me wrong. You may just be embarking on the most fun activity you've ever experienced in your life. Make the most of it. Be prepared, creative, flexible and intentional in your ministry with your team and you'll be surprised at the impact it makes on the people you go to visit.

So, how does this apply to you the leader? Where do you start? First, assess your own “people-loving” skills. If you are going to grow meaningful relationships you first need to know how well you value others beyond yourself. Jesus was the ultimate example in relationship building. The very Son of God spent time mentoring 12 men, sitting down and eating with sinners, conversing with an outcast woman by a well, welcoming little children into his arms.

Remember this! You have the opportunity to impact one group of people for an eternity. Be intentional about how you act and interact with this group.

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Go There Before You Get There

Please come to Jamaica and help us out! The plea came from a well respected ministry - it was one of those requests that we felt shouldn't be ignored.

Four months before leaving with the group, one other leader and I traveled to Jamaica to make sure all was ready as planned. We were told, there's lodging for 50, plenty of food, and all we need are the volunteers to help get the work done quickly.

Upon arrival in Kingston, we were met with a small 2 door super compact car that took several minutes for me to get my 6'2" frame into the back seat. We were driven to a building that had openings for doors and windows but had no doors or windows.

When it was announced that we were going to be staying here - I began rethinking the entire project.

I'm not opposed to "roughing it". In fact, some of the places that I've stayed in wouldn't make a good campsite in the US. But I'm a firm believer in safety and security for my teams and this site was neither safe nor secure.

We spent all of 24 hours in Jamaica and in the end decided that we would pass on this opportunity to help out.

There was no secure place for a team to stay. No facilities that could be used for meals. And the ministry had no real idea of how our "desperately needed help" was going to really make a difference in their ministry.

I no longer take anyone else's word for what my team is going to need during their stay. I'm responsible for the team and take that responsibility very seriously. I desire for God to stretch people but I will never intentionally place people in harms way just to see how God is going to protect them. That's too much like testing God and I'm not going there.

At the time, it may seem like a great expense. Another airfare and time away, but in the end you will be so

much better prepared. And your entire trip is better because of this preparation. This also allows you to be the creative, intentional, flexible leader that your team will need to be.

So, if you're thinking of taking a group to some foreign land begin by setting a date, maybe just a long weekend for you to go see what things really are going to be like. You will gain confidence by having a clearer understanding of what lies ahead for your group and you'll gain an insight into ways your team can really assist the ministry located there.

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7

Build Your Team First

I don't know if you've ever traveled with a group of people before but I've noticed that it seems to take a couple of days for people to get to know each other and become comfortable with one another. It takes us a while before we're willing to let our hair down and be who we really are.

We tend to spend the first couple of days trying to feel each other out and determine who in the group we really want to trust.

When you're traveling together on a short term mission trip you really don't have the time for this to take place during your trip. If your trip is only seven to ten days in length and you spend the first couple of days trying to figure out who's who in the group, that really is a huge waste of valuable time.

Spend time prior to your trip getting to know one another. One great way we have found to understand who people really are is through playing games. It is amazing to me how quickly you can determine who the leaders are within the group or who the competitive ones are through playing a simple game. You will quickly discern who are loud and boisterous and who are the quiet ones that you may need to keep track of.

Pull your team together and play a few simple games together such as Four-Square, Outburst, Taboo, Catchphrase, or Spoons. These games will help your team to bond as a group and help you to determine the personality types that will be traveling with you.

Another great way to build team is through praying together. We have found that by determining ahead of time some of the issues that we as a team are going to face over the next week or two and having the team begin praying for these items together as a group has helped to bind us together with purpose.

This is a great time to pray specifically for group members who are having difficulty raising funds or going through family separation issues. Often times

this will be a very difficult time for moms and dads who are leaving their children behind to travel with you. Pray through some of these issues together as a team. It will make your team stronger and more willing to be reliant on each other during the actual trip.

Pray specifically for the ministry that you are going to be working with. Pray for the impact that you will have on this ministry and the people they minister to. Pray specifically that nothing you do will hinder their ministry. This will help your group to be more aware of their actions during their stay.

If you begin to pray about the overall attitude of the group it will really set the tone that attitude really does impact everyone around us. The team has the ability then to hold each other accountable when attitudes need to be adjusted.

Prior to leaving on your trip it is important for your group to have fun together. Whether your team consists mainly of teens or mainly adults games and food are essential. Both will help you get to know people ahead of time which will allow you to accomplish much more during your time in country.

You can begin now by making a list of the people you know are going on your trip. What do you already know about them? What don't you know? In the same way, what would you like them to know about you? Which of the games or activities will you plan to use prior to your departure? What prayer requests can you already generate and begin sharing with the group? When do you plan to schedule your first pre-trip gathering to incorporate these principles?

By answering these questions you will be able to build a team that works well together and learns to care for each other and build each other up.



Staff Works

Part of the intentionality of helping your team to become better more mature disciples of Jesus Christ is for them to see the leaders at work. Few things will frustrate a team quicker than a leader who always finds ways to get out of work and/or always passes the menial work on to others.

Some mission opportunities, especially those dealing with high school students will dictate that a proper ratio between students and staff exists. Depending upon the age of the students going I like to have a ratio of at least 1 adult for every 7 students. Out of desperation we at times look for any warm body that fills the “adult” role in this situation. However, the adults are not simply chaperones that are solely responsible for watching over and bossing kids, they are very much a part of the team.

You might think of it this way. You are looking for adults that are excited about helping your teens to learn what it means to be a part of a team, grow in their understanding of who God wants them to become, and be a part of experiencing God at work around them. Kids learn a lot by example.

If we are to emulate Jesus than we must understand that servant leadership dictates that you and the rest of your staff work as hard if not harder than anyone else.

If you are in the planning phase of your trip begin to pray now for which adults God wants to go on the trip. When adults express an interest provide them with a detailed understanding of their responsibilities and expectations as servant leaders. Before leaving for the trip meet separately with your adult staff and outline the purpose and plans for the trip. Provide them with a sense of purpose and understanding of the important shaping roles they will be playing. Most importantly, join together with them in prayer for the trip and for each person going on the trip.



There's Enough Money

Bob and Kristen felt called of God to join us on a trip to the Gulf Coast following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. We were taking a group of high school students over Spring Break and Bob, one of the school's custodians felt that God really wanted them to travel along.

After several weeks of fundraising Bob approached me somewhat dejected. "I really feel like we're supposed to go", he said, "but absolutely no money has come in at this point. What should we do?" I encouraged him to wait patiently, pray continually, and continue to talk with people about the trip.

A couple of days later Bob met me at the school with a huge smile on his face. He had been working on his taxes and noticed that the refund he had coming was enough to cover property taxes and pay the full

amount for he and his wife to go. “I had to tell you because I knew you would love this story about how God works even through our taxes,” he said through his tremendous smile.

The fact of the matter is, Bob & Kristen never had the chance to use that tax refund to pay for the trip as time after time people approached them with checks asking if they could help with the trip.

By the time we left for Biloxi, Mississippi with our busload of students and staff, Bob and Kristen had covered the entire cost of the trip for both of them without ever having to pay out one dime of their own money.

Missionary biographies and stories are filled with similar accounts of God’s provision. The point is not that Bob and Kristen didn’t have to dip into their own funds but rather that they were

1. willing to follow God’s leading to go;
2. willing to use the funds God showed them they had. And,

1. willing to trust God and allow Him to use others to provide the resources required.

Being willing to trust God and following His leadings is a big part of what we can learn through this process. This is important in our growth process as Christians because through this we learn that his work is not about us but rather about us being willing to trust and serve and helping others to do this as well.

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Slow Down - You'll Have To

I can't count the number of hours I've spent in airports. I don't mean waiting for a flight, making a connection or waiting at baggage claim. I mean hours I've waited for people to actually pick me up.

The plans are all set and I rush off of the plane with only a carry-on bag. I'm only going to be visiting for a couple of days to make sure that everything is set for the group that will be arriving in a couple of months and I race out the door of the terminal not wanting to waste a minute of precious time.

As I look around at the multitudes of people that gather outside most airports in the world I struggle to find a familiar face. Not seeing one, I find a warm spot in the sun and sit down to wait. Minutes can turn into hours and I watch as the crowds around me shrink and then swell again as another plane lands.

As I finish saying, “no” to the hundredth person asking, “Taxi Mister” I look up and spy a familiar face in the crowd. My ride has arrived. But most of this day has left.

The reasons for being late are many and varied. Sometimes important ministry gets in the way of picking up the “gringo” at the airport. Occasionally, it’s simply a matter of the concept of time being of much less importance to them than it is to me.

For those of us who plan to travel to another country, especially from the United States one of the first lessons we need to learn is to slow down. At home we rush from the breakfast table to work to school to practice to the store to games and finally to bed to make sure we get the sleep we need to rush around again tomorrow. Most other countries have much less fascination with clocks and the concept of time than we do.

We are often unable to examine our cultural beliefs and practices until we step outside of our own culture. Americans are driven individuals and place a high value on going, and being gone, doing, doing more, and doing even more. One of the wonderful things

that can happen on a short-term trip is that we come face to face with obstacles or as I see them, blessings. These blessings that seem to slow us down actually force each one of us to adjust to the idea that in God's plan, taking time for personal reflection, introspection and building important relationships are each far more valuable spiritual uses of time than accomplishing a task just to say we got it done.

Think about the gift you've just been given. It certainly doesn't feel like much of a gift now but free time is something we all long for. Make the most of these moments by taking time to exchange some money or simply sit back and meet some of the most interesting people you may never see again in your life. Enjoy the slow moments. Life's about to get very hectic for you and God knew you needed a break.

Understand that time is different in other countries. Unlike the US we must be ready for the days activities but we must also be ready to wait. Take time to pray, sing together, play silly games together.

In Haiti, our team always had to be ready for the truck to arrive and take us to the worksite at 8 but sometimes it would not arrive until 9 or later. As a

leader I had to be ready to occupy the team while waiting for the truck. This was a great time to pray for the day, share thoughts about experiences so far, and sing together.

Just a reminder, Expectations are your enemy, flexibility is your friend. If you are flexible as a leader this will trickle down to your team members as well.

11

Duffle Bags

Have you every tried to but a square peg in a round hole? Or tried to put two large square suitcases into the trunk of a car? They just don't fit. I always travel with a duffle bag simply because it can be wedged, stuffed, kicked, and forced into place which means my luggage almost always gets in the car when I travel.

Which reminds me of how warmly the sun shone in the cool breeze as we walked out of baggage claim and into the short-term parking lot of the Budapest airport. There were only two of us and we were simply stopping overnight on our way from one Eastern European country to the next.

A local missionary we knew stopped by to pick us up and take us to dinner and our hotel. It was a great

opportunity for us to see the city from their viewpoint and catch up with folks we hadn't seen in several years.

As we approached their car my mind immediately went back to all of the years that I have encouraged people to pack their belongings in duffle bags. I think duffle bags are the coolest invention of the 20th century. They hold a tremendous amount of stuff yet they fit into some of the most unique spaces.

The missionary's car was large enough to hold four people but it had absolutely no trunk. This meant that everything we had packed for our two week stay in Eastern Europe needed to fit into the small back-seat with us. Yes we were cramped but our duffle bags fit nicely on our laps as we were driven around the city for the next 45 minutes.

Whether you're being picked up in a car, a van, a bus, or a cart being pulled by a donkey I have always found that you can fit a much larger quantity of luggage into any one of these if everyone packs in duffle bags.

In fact, we believe in duffle bags so much at Simply Missions that we provide one for everyone on every

trip that goes out. It guarantees flexibility for each of our groups that are traveling.

Here is a sample packing list that we have used with several trips. We modify it as needed with each trip.

Packing List

Passport	Bible
Notebook	Pen
Pajamas	Toiletries
Beach Towel	Socks
Sunglasses	Sunscreen
Camera	Flashlight
Bug Spray	Underwear
Lightweight Jacket	Souvenir \$
Slippers / Flipflops	Book
Casual Shirts (T-Shirts are fine)	
Knee Length Shorts (Okay for work)	
Girls - Skirt / Dress	
Comfortable shoes	
Other shoe (sandals optional)	
Swimsuit (one piece - Modest)	
Shorts to hang out in	
Medications (i.e., Allergy, etc)	

*Do NOT bring electronic devices such as mp3 players or games!

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12

Should I Eat That?

The leaders had made plans for each member of the group to have lunch at one of the locals houses after church one Sunday. In an attempt to be polite and not offend the hosts and hostesses, each member was instructed to eat whatever was placed in front of them, recognizing that for many of these families it was both a real honor and a real sacrifice to provide this meal for the group.

After the meals were over the group leader approached several of the hosts to ask how everything had gone at lunch. One host was a bit confused. He thought it went really well, he enjoyed having the young man over for lunch but he had to wonder, “Why did he eat the coaster?” It seems that the family had placed a cork coaster at each place setting and the young man visiting was so overly conscious of not

offending that he ate what he thought to be the absolute worst tasting rice cake he'd ever had.

Whether or not you should eat everything placed before you is really an issue that you need to work out with God. Personally, I have never had a problem with food but I know a number of people who have. I have found that honesty really is the best policy. If someone traveling with me struggles with certain foods because of allergies or is highly susceptible to food borne illnesses you should explain this to your host.

I also recognize that one of the greatest concern of a leader and probably of each team member is the fear of getting ill on a trip. Simple steps can be taken to stay healthy when eating in a culturally different setting. Begin by drinking clean liquids such as sodas from a capped bottle. Drink bottled water and brush your teeth with bottled water. Don't eat vegetables that have not been properly washed (even bleached), keep hand sanitizer on you and wash your hands and around your mouth and nose frequently. Eat only fruits that you can peel. And finally, don't eat the food offered by a roadside vendor. It might look tempting and your mind might justify it by seeing that it has

been cooked thoroughly. However, the utensils that are used are often covered in bacteria that you won't see before it's too late.

The key is to always remain gracious and grateful for whatever sacrifices the families have made on your behalf. Be polite in turning down food that is offered and be very careful about placing demands on your hosts when it comes to food and food preparation.

On a side note, we all forget to use our brains on occasion and do things that in retrospect we can't believe we actually did. Our first trip into Haiti we brought in our own food, sterilized the water, used powdered milk for cereal, and went through gallons of powdered gatorade. Yet even with all of these precautions many of our team members were getting sick. It wasn't until our return the next year that we realized we had never considered the ice. We purchased large blocks of ice from the back of a truck, dusted off the sawdust that it was coated in to keep it from melting, rinsed it off and put it into the coolers to make our milk and gatorade cold. It never occurred to me that ice is made from water and I had no idea where the ice company had gotten their water from.

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The next year we placed the ice into ziplock bags and then placed the bags into the coolers. We had cold milk and no one got sick.

It's amazing what happens when we actually use the brains God gives us.

13

Prayer Partners

“I have the chance to go on this wonderful short term missions trip and I really need money but I really would like you to also pray for this ministry that I have the chance to be a part of.”

Asking others to be praying for your mission trip is a great line in a support letter and it needs to be there. But it has become so cliché in Christian circles that it is an expected statement in a fund raising letter and once people have given their money many times the letter gets put aside and in some cases doesn't get thought of again.

I wonder at times, if we really understand how powerful prayer really is and how dependent upon prayer we need to be. It has been said, “With much prayer comes much power, with little prayer comes little power, with no prayer comes no power.”

Prayer is God's way of accomplishing His purposes in our daily service for him. If you are looking for your mission trip to have a powerful impact on the people you are going to serve you need to encourage prayer partners.

Prayer Partners are simply people who commit to praying daily for each individual on your trip. To make this work, each participant of the mission trip finds 5 to 10 people who will commit in writing to pray daily for the group that is going. Ask specifically for prayer for spiritual growth on the trip, safety, team unity, wisdom for the leaders, and the specific task you plan to accomplish on your trip.

If your team consists of 10 people you will have 50 to 100 people praying a covering over your group every day!

It becomes vitally important that you communicate with these prayer partners so that they can pray with boldness and confidence. As a part of their commitment to pray they should begin praying two weeks prior to the trip and then pray everyday right through the end of your trip.

Communication to these prayer partners can be through blogs, emails, or phone calls but communicate, communicate, communicate. Your prayer partners are the vital link to power for your team and should be called or written to before you call or write to family.

Before your mother knows you arrived safely in the country, your prayer partners should know you arrived safely. They are that important! 1 Thessalonians 5:24,25 reminds us that “Faithful is he who calls you and he will do it; brothers pray for us.”

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14

Trinkets & Trash

The largest outdoor market in Central America is located in the city of Chichicastenango, Guatemala. Every week the entire city shuts down on Sunday and again on Thursday for the market. Vendors come from the surrounding mountainside to sell their wares in the streets.

In my mind it resembles what a market in Jesus' day would have look like. Horse and mule drawn carts bring literally tons of woven fabrics, wooden carvings, and hammered metals. The vendors each take up twelve foot by twelve foot space on the street where they settle in for a day of shopping and bargains.

If you ever have the chance to visit Chichicastenango on market day you'll notice that none of the merchandise has a price marked on it. The price you'll be quoted may differ throughout the day and no

one will ever expect you to pay the price that has been quoted. In fact, many will find it insulting that you fail to play the game of “let’s dicker over the price.”

The challenge for most who visit markets like this around the world is to determine just when a good price is a good price. How do you know in the end that you paid the right price for the right product?

Here’s my advice to you. Face these opportunities with an attitude that says, “It doesn’t really matter.” “I really don’t care what price I pay for any of this stuff.” Enjoy the moments of craziness in trying to establish a price.

Didn’t you just have a tremendous amount of fun being with people, making them laugh, and laughing at yourself in the process? How much would you be willing to pay for such an experience?

I know people who have gotten so caught up in the haggling and dickering that they missed out on the simple joy of being with people. In some cases they’ve even missed out on purchasing a small trinket that they really would have liked because they wouldn’t budge another dollar or two.

It really doesn't matter what you buy or at what price you buy it. What matters most is people; both the people on your team and the people from the community. The rest is simply trinkets and trash and in light of eternity really has no value at all.

A perspective that has helped many when it comes to bartering is to recognize that bartering is a cultural means of communication and fun for the locals. Learn to play this game and you will have fun with them. There is nothing more rewarding than to see a vendor frown at your low bid only to sell something to you for a few pennies more, smile, shake your hand and want to have their picture taken with you. Bartering is not to be construed as rude. Rude would be not to enter into the game of bartering since it is culturally expected. When in doubt remember this; no one will sell you something at a price that will lose them money.

Probably the most asked question prior to leaving on a trip is, "How much money should I bring with me?" The answer is really quite simple. It doesn't matter if you bring \$50 or \$500 the only difference is how much stuff your going to come home with.

Don't allow the trinkets and trash along the way rob you of the joy of serving others and investing in the lives of those around you.

15

Mind if I Shoot You?

We were riding in the back of a small pickup truck driving ever so slowly up the mountain path in Haiti with several women and children running alongside the truck laughing and chatting with our group. Suddenly, one of the women began yelling at our group in Creole and banging on the side of the truck with her hand. The driver stopped and inquired as to what had upset her.

She explained that a young girl in the back had stolen her spirit and she wanted it back. Not understanding modern technology this woman fully believed that when the girl had pointed her camera at her and taken her picture she had somehow magically captured her spirit and taken it captive in this strange box.

No amount of explaining on our part could undo the damage done by an incorrect first impression.

Pictures aren't worth the damage they can do to a local ministry. Always, always, always ask permission of the subject prior to taking their picture. Realize also that when you ask many of these people will ask you for a little money in return. Check with the local ministry about how they would like this handled before you begin paying people for their photographs. This too can cause long term damage to a ministry that you thought you were helping.

This is another great area to discuss in your pre-trip orientation meetings. A little time spent discussing the ramifications of each of our actions is necessary to sensitize your people to the practices that will make their trip a success.

16

Stay Together

As a group leader myself, I can't stress enough how important this concept of staying together is for you to understand. We live in a society of independent individuals. But for your mission trip you are a team, a cohesive team, a team that stays together at all costs.

This is vitally true when traveling by air. As you step up to the ticket counter at the airport you step up as a group. You leave the ticket counter as a group and go through security together as a group. I always try to have an adult go through security first and an adult at the very end. This way you contain your entire group and keep everyone together. When you get through security you do a head count and make sure that everyone in your group is accounted for before you head to the gate. Upon arriving at the gate you board the plane together as a group and make sure that the

last person on the plane has accounted for everyone in your group before they board.

A ninety percent is an “A” when you’re in school but bringing home 90% of your team is not an “A” for a short term mission leader. One of your primary goals as a team leader is to not lose anyone. You can accomplish this goal by keeping everyone together as a team.

Personal experience has taught me that the airlines will wait a short while for a group of people. They will not wait for an individual.

We were running through Houston’s Intercontinental Airport because our flight was delayed coming in from Central America. As we proceeded through immigration and customs it became clear that we were going to miss our connecting flight to Detroit. It became very tempting at that point to send portions of the team on ahead to see if we could still make the plane, but we didn’t. We stayed together as a group.

We had one thing working in our favor and I wasn’t willing to give it up. Airlines will fly without 2 or 3 of their passengers but we accounted for 18 of their

seats. We moved our group as quickly as possible through the airport and, sure enough, the plane was waiting for us.

This same principle works while traveling with cars and busses as well. Often we think we can drive ahead because we know the way. However, when one vehicle breaks down, and chances are good in the developing world that one will, you want your group to be together. Nothing is worse than a team leader having no idea where part of their group is.

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17

It's Not About You!

(or your special project)

Let me buy you a cup of coffee.

A simple offer that could be implemented three different ways. First, I could meet you outside the coffee shop and hand you a five dollar bill. You have enough money to buy your coffee with possibly a little change left over. I have done what I said I would do and bought you a cup of coffee.

Another option would be to actually go into the coffee shop, purchase coffee for both of us and sit down together. Over a rushed conversation, I drink the hot liquid as quickly as my lips and tongue allow. As soon as my cup is empty I leave the shop to do the many important things on my list for the day. Again, I have done what I said I would do and bought you a cup of

coffee. Afterwards I may think how rude it may have seemed to you for me to be in such a hurry to finish my coffee.

A final option is to meet you in the parking lot, walk in together and buy coffee for both of us. This time however, instead of drinking my coffee as quickly as possible, I sit and listen to what's going on in your life. At one point during our conversation I realize that the coffee in my partially empty cup is cold. I envision that we could take a 5 minute coffee break and turn it into an hour long conversation where I find out about your struggles in life, your job, your family, and any other issues that you want to discuss. In the process you find out about me as well. Again, I have done what I said I would do and bought you a cup of coffee, but this time so much more was accomplished. Time was taken to build our relationship and encourage each other in our walks with God.

It's not about the coffee! It never was. For years we have simply used coffee and coffee shops as an excuse for building relationships. So, what does all of this have to do with your upcoming missions trip?

Let me build you a house.

For several years now I have been coordinating short-term mission projects to Guatemala to assist the church in its ministry to widows in the mountainous central region of this country. For many of these widows, teams have come to the country to build them a modest house. And building a house for a widow is similar to buying a cup of coffee for a friend. Just like providing cash for the coffee, we could simply provide the cash needed for the house to be built. While this provides a great product for a Guatemalan widow, it really eliminates any opportunity we might have to build a relationship with her and her family and show what an impact Jesus can have on their lives.

We also have the option of racing through the construction process, thereby demonstrating our superior construction ability. However, it appears to be a bit rude to race in and out of their lives as quickly as possible. Is it our goal to just quickly build a house and move on to the next project? If this is our mindset are we really taking any time to build a relationship with the widow and her family? Did she see Jesus at work in us?

Our final option is to take our time, put *our* agenda on hold, get to know and understand the lives of the widow and the children who will live in this newly constructed house. Language can be a barrier in the mountains of central Guatemala but certain activities can overcome even the largest barriers. In the past, our teams have brought soccer balls and have “interrupted” the construction process several times throughout the day to start up a game of “futbol” with the neighborhood children. Teams have also brought balloons along and attempted to make balloon animals. No language skills are needed to do the “Chicken Dance!” or the “Hokey Pokey!” In the end so much more than a house is built. Time has been taken to show the love of Christ.

It's not about building houses! It never was. It's important to remind ourselves that ministry is about building relationships and pointing people toward Christ, it's not about our projects. It's about people not buildings. And it's about what God's plans are for us, not what our plans are for the day.

A simple thought to keep in mind as you prepare your

team to travel to anywhere in the world and minister to the people living there. Buildings come and go but relationships that point people to the Savior will last for eternity.

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18

God is Bigger than You Think

One problem with traveling by plane to another country is that you are limited to the size of packages that you can bring with you. Because of this we were hoping to find some large pieces of poster-board or construction paper to use for assemblies that we had planned for our week in country.

We had small 8.5 x 11 pieces of paper that were different colors representing the colors depicted in The Wordless Book. However, we were expecting crowds numbering into the hundreds and we knew that these small pieces of paper would not have the proper effect. Not having any idea where we would find something large that also came in the colors depicted in the book like black for sin, red for the blood of Christ, white for pure hearts, green for growth in Christ and gold for streets in heaven we committed our efforts to the Lord. Then went for a

walk around the small community in which we were staying, hoping to find something, anything that would work.

As we turned the corner, less than one block away from the Guest House that our group was staying in, we ran across a plastic store. The store itself wasn't made of plastic; rather the store sold items that were made of plastic. Large racks were located right by the front door that had rolls of plastic sheeting that came in a wide variety of colors and patterns. As we looked over the the rolls that were available we noticed that every color we were looking for was represented right there on a rack within 100 yards of where we were staying.

Not only did we not have to figure out how to package poster-board in such a way to get it shipped without damaging it, nor did we have to pay for oversized baggage to get these props to the country, but God provided the supplies we needed, right where we were, and for a total of approximately \$2.00 US. Also, instead of having poster-board that had dimensions of 2' by 3' we now had sheets of plastic that were 3' wide by 6' long. They made excellent props for the story we were about to tell.

It seems a small thing to be worried or concerned over small props for an assembly that we really could do without if we absolutely had too. Yet it was a reminder to each of us on this trip as to the detail that God is interested in.

Again, I can't emphasize more the need for you and your team to be praying individually and as a group for the needs you have. God already has a solution for the needs your group will face. This will encourage your team as they see God answer prayers in imaginative ways and strengthen their levels of trust in Him for the next need.

Remember, if it concerns you, it concerns Him. I believe this is one of the reasons that Peter states to us in 1 Peter 5:7 that we should be "casting all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you."

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19

Make Sure You Don't End Up Hugging Harry

This is one of those stories that I could have placed in almost any chapter. There are so many good lessons to learn from it that I hope you have the ability to learn from my mistakes and not make any of these yourself. If you don't read any other chapter in this book, please read this one carefully and learn from my mistakes.

The call came from Wally. A leadership conference was going to be held in Nigeria and the gentleman who would be teaching with him was no longer able to go. Would I be willing to join him?

After agreeing to travel with him and speak at the conference I found out that Wally would be traveling from the country of Mali and he would meet up with

me the morning after I would be arriving in Nigeria.

The information I was given was that I would arrive on Sunday evening and Pastor Jude would be waiting for me at the Lagos airport. Jude would take me to a local motel where we would spend the evening. Wally would arrive the following morning and we would travel by air to another part of the country to teach at the conference.

I had never met Pastor Jude and had no idea what he looked like. As I boarded my plane in Detroit, Michigan my wife asked me if I was concerned at all about meeting up with Pastor Jude in Lagos, Nigeria. I responded that I was confident that he would have a sign with my name on it and there would be no problem at all.

As I got off the plane and proceeded through immigration and customs I prepared to meet Pastor Jude. Looking around at the people holding signs in the customs area I didn't see anyone with my name on their sign so I headed outdoors. At six thirty in the evening the sun had already set as I began to walk out the doorway. As I picked up my luggage and stepped toward the door I remember muttering a quick prayer,

“Okay God, here we go, help me find this guy.”

I had only taken two steps out the door when a young man approached me with a small piece of paper in his hand. The paper read, “Jude welcomes Bob.” I was excited. This was even easier than I thought. The gentleman said his name was Harry and that Jude had sent him to pick me up.

I gave Harry a big hug. I felt like my travels were complete. Harry would take me to the hotel where I needed to go and we would meet up with Wally in the morning.

Harry led me back into the airport and up to the second level where his car and a driver were waiting. We put my bags in the trunk, I jumped in the backseat and Harry sat up front with the driver. After about a half hour of driving I began thinking back on a conversation that I had had with Wally. He had said that Jude would pick me up and bring me to a hotel that was very close to the airport because he was concerned about security in Lagos.

I began paying less attention to what little scenery I could see in the dark and tried harder to concentrate

on the conversation taking place in the front seat. I had not been threatened in any way but something about this ride simply wasn't adding up. We were driving around but didn't seem to have a destination in mind.

I remember asking them both several times if they were having difficulty finding the hotel and it must have been about the third time that I asked the question that they began to question me about how much money I had transported through customs. Harry was even so kind as to offer to hold it for me because Lagos was a very unsafe city.

Realizing that I was not heading for a hotel to meet up with Pastor Jude I began to question Harry and the driver as to what their role was with Jude. I remember asking Harry, "Do you work with Jude?" to which Harry replied, "Yes, I'm his P.R.O."

I've been around the church my entire life and this was an acronym that I was not familiar with so I asked Harry what P.R.O. stood for. He informed me that it stands for Public Relations Officer. I don't know about you but I've yet to meet a church, especially a small one in west Africa that had a P.R.O. on staff.

I asked to speak with Jude on the phone and after a lengthy conversation between the two of them, conveniently held in a language other than English, they decided that I indeed could speak with Jude.

They called someone on the phone, spoke with him for a few minutes in their native tongue and then handed the phone to me so I could talk with “Jude”.

I only had one question for the person on the other end of the phone. “What is name of the gentleman that we are going to meet at the airport in the morning?” I figured if this guy could come up with the name Wally then he really must be Jude.

Instead of answering my question he mumbled something about Harry taking me to a hotel at which point I hung up the phone and tossed it back into the front seat. The phone bounced off the dashboard and landed on the floor at Harry’s feet. This seemed to really upset the driver.

He pulled the car to the curb, stopped the car, got out, and headed toward the back of the car. At the same time, Harry got out of the car and headed forward away from the car. Not wanting to be left in the car all

by myself, I got out and began following Harry. As I yelled out his name he stopped and turned back toward me. The driver about this same time grabbed me from behind pinning my arms to my backpack. As I struggled to get free from the driver Harry stuck his hands in my pants pockets and relieved me of a couple hundred dollars in cash.

The driver then opened my backpack and overlooking the video camera and still camera that I had in the pack took out a palm pilot instead. He looked it over and mumbled “cassette” and threw it back in the pack. He then proceeded to the trunk of the car to go through my luggage.

And that’s when I got tired of playing the game. I don’t remember consciously thinking about what I was doing I just remember that I had an overwhelming sense that I needed to get back to the airport. I ran to rear of the car, pushed the driver to one side, grabbed both of my bags, and ran out into the middle of the street in front of oncoming traffic.

The car coming at me had no choice but to stop and when he did I opened the back door of his car, threw my luggage in, opened the front door, jumped in and

shouted, “Go, Go I’m being robbed.”

Thankfully, the gentleman in this car simply drove away and I began sharing my story with him about getting picked up at the airport, being driven around for a couple of hours, and being robbed. His response to me was, “This is not right, we should love one another.” I couldn’t have agreed with him more so I replied, “That sounds like it comes from the Bible, do you read the Bible.” He smiled and said, “Of course I do, I’m a Jehovah’s Witness.”

My good samaritan drove me to the local police station to file a report, took me to airport security to file another report, and offered to allow me to spend the evening at his home. I was quite concerned that I might miss Wally coming in the next morning so I chose to spend what was left of the night on a bench in the airport.

The next day around noon a gentleman in a burgundy sport coat approached me in the airport. He had a very concerned look on his face as he asked me, “Are you Bob?” I replied, “Yes, are you Jude?” When he said yes I asked at that point if he could prove it.

As we sorted out the story I learned that Jude is a man who is quite literally, deathly afraid of the city of Lagos. He wanted to make sure that I would be as secure as possible so he had hired two security guards dressed in military outfits and carrying automatic weapons to meet me at the airport. Jude then stood outside the airport with one of these security guards on either side of him as he held up a large sign that read “Jude welcomes Bob”.

We can only speculate that Harry and his friend thought they were kidnapping someone worth many dollars. It must have been a very disappointing evening for them.

There are many lessons one can learn from an experience like this and I’m sure you can come up with several additional ones if you try. But here are a couple that really jumped out at me.

1. Don’t travel anywhere alone. A travel partner is good for many reasons. The old adage says, “There is safety in numbers” and there is real truth in this statement whether safety from outside physical dangers or due to accountability factors. Never travel alone!

2. Know who it is that will be picking you up at the airport. There will be times when the person who has agreed to pick you up has to send someone else. At times like these try to have a prearranged code that allows you to identify the person picking you up. It's better to know before you get in the car with someone.
3. God protects even in the midst of our own stupidity. Some of the things I did on this evening were just plain dumb. Yet in the midst of it all I never once feared for my life. One of the ways God protected me was by overwhelming my mind with the thought of how I would get back to the airport. I was so consumed with this thought that I never once thought about what they could or would do to me.

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Band Aids are Not Available In the Jungle

Quick, name three things you can't find in the jungle. If you've ever found yourself stuck out in the woods or in that lonely town in the middle of nowhere then you have a small idea of what you will not be able to readily find in developing nations. Band-Aids and peanut butter are not available in the jungle and neither are Wal-Mart stores.

As Americans we have developed a tendency to forego preparation because anything that we may need is always just a few short blocks away at the local convenience store. Not so in the rest of the world. You may not have been aware of this but peanut butter is truly a American phenomenon. In twenty-seven years of traveling the globe I have yet to run into another country with a fascination for this

product like we have in the United States. We will even go so far as to argue over whether or not its texture should be extremely smooth or extra crunchy.

You may not be an aficionado of peanut butter but odds are very good that there is some other product that will be needed by someone in your group and it will not be available in your international locale. If you've never taken this advice before, take it now . . . **BE PREPARED.**

The American Red Cross recommends that all first aid kits for a family of four include the following items and I would suggest this should be the very minimum that you as a group leader be prepared with:

- 2 absorbent compress dressings (5 x 9 inches)
- 25 adhesive bandages (assorted sizes)
- 1 adhesive cloth tape (10 yards x 1 inch)
- 5 antibiotic ointment packets (approximately 1 gram)
- 5 antiseptic wipe packets
- 2 packets of aspirin (81 mg each)
- 1 blanket (space blanket)
- 1 breathing barrier (with one-way valve)

- 1 instant cold compress
- 2 pair of nonlatex gloves (size: large)
- 2 hydrocortisone ointment packets (approximately 1 gram each)
- Scissors
- 1 roller bandage (3 inches wide)
- 1 roller bandage (4 inches wide)
- 5 sterile gauze pads (3 x 3 inches)
- 5 sterile gauze pads (4 x 4 inches)
- Oral thermometer (non-mercury/nonglass)
- 2 triangular bandages
- Tweezers
- First aid instruction booklet

Your local county health department can be of great service as you prepare to lead your team overseas. Consult with them several months before your scheduled departure date to see what items they recommend for each member of your team. They will also have a list of vaccinations that they may recommend for your group members prior to traveling.

Also, keep in mind that items like mosquito repellent, anti-diarrhea medication, and a product like Benadryl

are usually difficult to find overseas but they are great items to have on hand.

21

Go To Church

“That has to be the highlight of my trip!” “I don’t think I’ll ever forget the singing.” “The pastor was so personable with the congregation, what a great church!”

Imagine that you’re thousands of miles from home, everything seems to look, sound and smell differently than it does back home. You’re starting to feel a little homesick. Then, unexpectedly, you bump into an old friend or family member. The joy of that encounter is overwhelming, suddenly you’re not so homesick after all.

That feeling is exactly why you should attend a local church while on your trip. It’s the one spot where you’ll meet “family.” On several trips we have

gathered together as a group and had a nice time of praise, worship, and devotions together, sharing a special moment with God. However, I think we missed some great opportunities to understand the bigger meaning of “Church”. I believe that you are missing out on a great opportunity if you don’t take advantage of attending a local church.

The best part of going to church in a foreign country is that seldom does the worship resemble in any way what the service looks like in your hometown. What an eye opener. What a great opportunity for each one on your trip to be reminded just how big the family of God really is.

22

¿Dónde Está el Baño?

You've probably heard the joke, "Did you know that in Heaven everyone will speak English? That's because people from the U.S. can't learn another language!"

Seriously, you may be asking, how much of the language should I speak before I go to another country? Well let me tell you, nothing makes the face of a Kenyan light up like hearing you say anything in Kiswahili. I was never more embarrassed than when I jumped into the backseat of a taxi in Haiti and the driver proceeded to ask me a series of questions.

"Parlez-vous le français?" to which I responded "No!"

"Sprechen Sie Deutsch?" to which I responded, "No!"

“¿Dice usted el español?” to which I responded, “No!”

“What, you only speak English?” to which I responded, “Well, yeah”

So much for thinking I was the highly educated one.

It doesn't take a lot of effort on your team's part to try and learn a few simple phrases in the language of the people you are going to minister alongside. Simply being able to ask a person's name, and phrases like “Please”, “Thank you”, “Excuse me” will go a long way toward showing people that you really care.

You can ask the people you are going to serve alongside for some simple phrases that everyone on your team can learn.

I've noticed that more times than not people around the world would like to practice their English with me. They are far more willing to open up and speak if I first become vulnerable with them and try to speak their language.

We have made a number of web links available to our teams on our website at wwwSimplyMissions.org.

Several websites are available to help your team learn some small key phrases in the native language of the country you will be traveling to. Don't be afraid to jump in and learn simple phrases like . . .

. . . Hello!

. . . Please.

. . . Thank You!

. . . How are you?

. . . God loves you!

and

. . . May I pray for you?

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23

Activities & Things to Do in a Pinch

It always seems to happen. You have plans for a great day of building, or an outdoor concert and the clouds seem to let loose with a torrential downpour. Now what do you do? You're stuck at your residence and you can't get to where you thought your ministry was going to take place.

Remember, flexibility is our friend and when plans have to be changed it provides a great opportunity to build relationships within your team members. Here are a couple of things that we've tried that work great at building a sense of team and camaraderie. You might also want to bring some of your favorite games that you've played with your family. Games like Taboo, Apples to Apples, Catch Phrase, Scattergories, etc.

Prayer Walk

If the weather permits, (or even if its raining), this is a great idea for anytime you find yourself with a little extra time on your hands. Nowhere in scripture does it state that your eyes must be closed while you are praying. So, take advantage of what is around you and the time you have. Divide your group into small teams of 2 or 3 people and have them simply walk through the town talking with each other and God about what they see.

I am always amazed at the stories that these groups come back with. Many of them will have their eyes opened for the first time to some of the real needs around them.

This also translates well into a skill that can be used once they return home. Once home, have your group get together for a prayer walk around the part of town that your church is located in. You will be amazed as your eyes are opened anew to the opportunities God has placed in your neighborhood.

Cleaning & Sorting

I've never met a ministry guesthouse, office, storage facility, church building, or other structure that couldn't use a good cleaning. What a great opportunity to use this "free time" to contribute to this ministry by using a little elbow grease.

Sometimes you just need to take out time and sit down and play a game. I'm including a couple of my favorites here. They create a fun atmosphere, good team building, and take very little preparation.

Numbers

This game is best played around a table and requires one die, one pencil or pen, and everyone to have a scrap piece of paper.

The object of the game is to be the first person at the table to write out all of the numbers 1 through 100. The catch is that there is only one pencil and it is the only pencil that can be used to write out your numbers.

Begin by having the person at the head of the table

start writing out the numbers 1,2,3,4, . . . on their sheet of paper. At the same time, the person to their left will be rolling the die in an attempt to roll a one. When they successfully roll the number one they grab the pencil and begin writing the numbers 1,2,3,4, . . . while the person to their left begins rolling the die to get a one.

As the pencil and die make their way around the table and get back to the original writer they continue writing numbers from where they left off. For example, if on their first attempt they made it all the way to the number 12 then on their second turn they begin with 13 and keep writing as fast as they can. The first person to reach 100 on their paper is the winner.

Whose Story is It?

Have you ever seen the game show To Tell The Truth? This is a variation on that show. Pass out slips of paper and pens. Have everyone briefly write down a

true story or experience that happened to them on the paper along with their name. The more bizarre, the better. Fold the slips of paper and put them into the container, shuffling them and mixing them up.

The “Host” picks out one slip of paper and calls out the names of three people, one of which is the person whose name appears on the card. These three then sit on chairs or a couch apart from the group. The “Host” reads off the story and then the group tries to figure out who the story belongs to. The group does this by asking each of the people seated up to four questions each.

The people seated on the chairs try to convince the group that this story really happened to them. After everyone on the couch has told a few different stories, the group votes. This repeats until everyone has had a turn. The main goal of the game is to have fun telling stories and learn a few interesting or humorous facts about each other.

Four on a Couch

Four On A Couch is a memory-based game that takes a moment to learn. Form a circle with the couch (or four chairs) as part of the circle. Place two males and two females on the couch, and have the rest of the people fill in the circle, in alternating order (guy next to girl — no two guys next to each other, and no two girls next to each other). One chair must be left open. Have everyone fill out their name on a piece of paper. Place all the pieces of paper in a container. Go around the room and have someone pick out a piece of paper with someone's name on it (they cannot have their own name). They must not let anyone know whose name they have. The person to the left of the empty chair begins by calling out someone's name. The person who is holding a paper with that name must move from their seat to the empty seat. At this point the person calling the name and the person who moved exchange papers with names on them. They now move when their new name is called. The object of the game is for the guys to get four guys on the couch while the girls try to get four girls on the couch. This game sometimes leads to humorous results due to its gender-based competitive nature.

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The Magic Formula

It never ceases to amaze me the lengths people are willing to go to serve others. I was recently in a small slum community just outside of Lusaka, Zambia traveling with a gentleman who had never been out of the United States before. Living conditions in this community were some of the worst I've seen anywhere and trust me I've seen some pretty poor places.

We were teaching pastors in this community and we found out later that this particular community is listed as one of the most violent locales on the continent of Africa. Upon returning home I overheard this gentleman recounting his time in Zambia. His comments spoke volumes. "If I hadn't been able to get out of there, eat some decent food and take a hot

shower, Bob would have never gotten me to go back the second day.”

I have learned over the years that it doesn’t take much to give everyone a great experience. In fact, there really is a magic formula.

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{Good Bed} \\ \text{Good Food} \\ + \quad \text{Hot Water} \\ \hline \text{Great Experience} \end{array}$$

I think about the extreme heat and humidity found in the central portions of Honduras and I recall the hard back breaking labor that groups have done mixing concrete to help build houses following Hurricane Mitch. I realize that they would not have been able to work as hard as they did had we not been providing the team members a comfortable bed, good quality food, and a nice hot shower.

You are about to embark on a short-term trip. For some of you that may simply mean a long weekend. We’ve all had the thought, “Anyone can suffer through a week, this is missions after all.” However, if you

don't care for the needs of your group, upon returning home what your group will remember is their lack of sleep, the constant hunger, and/or the lack of cleanliness.

Part of our role as a short-term missions leader is to help the people we take to different parts of the world see this world for what it is and to help them build relationships with the people there. At the same time as the leader, you need to take care of the needs of your group.

As part of planning for your trip make certain that wherever you bring your group the magic formula is in play.

Simply Serving

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VISA - Not Simply a Credit Card

The world has changed after September 11th and one of the changes includes having a passport and depending upon the country you visit, a visa from that country as well.

Let's deal with passports first. If you are traveling outside of the U.S., everyone needs one. Its as simple as that.

Beginning in January of 2007, anyone including US citizens arriving into the United States by air must have a valid passport. A valid passport is considered to be one that will not expire within 6 months of the date of your return. This means that if you are currently holding a passport and it is due to expire sometime within the next year you need to get working on a renewal.

Some airlines will deny you boarding privileges at the airport if your passport is less than 6 months from its expiration date.

Information on how to obtain a US passport is available online at <http://travel.state.gov/passport>

Prior to leaving home you will want to make copies of all of your important documents. These include your passport, driver's license, credit cards, airline tickets, and vaccination certificate. Leave a copy of each of these documents with someone you trust who will be able to fax them to you in an emergency. By having these copies it will make it easier to replace them if they become lost or stolen.

A visa is simply a stamp in your passport from the country you are about to enter. In most cases this stamp is required in your passport prior to leaving your native country. These stamps are provided by the country you will be entering and are usually available through that countries embassy by filling out a short application form and paying the appropriate fee.

Most countries work diligently on visa applications and attempt to get them back to you within a couple of weeks after applying.

This means that you will need to plan ahead. Your passport will need to be sent to the embassy for them to stamp it and then they will need time to return it to you.

One of the easiest ways to determine whether or not anyone in your group will require a visa to enter a prospective country is to go to the embassy website for that country. These can be located quickly and easily on a website located at <http://www.embassy.org/embassies>

Simply Serving

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Monitoring World Crisis'

Our world is changing daily. A website is available that can give you information about what is going on in the world. Want to know if the airport employees or bus drivers are going to be on strike in a particular country? You can be kept up to date through daily emails.

All you need to do is subscribe to a service called HotSpots, which will send you a daily email with Hot Issues from around the world. We have included a link that will allow you to subscribe for free to this service at www.SimplyMissions.org.

Simply Serving

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Is Your Ambassador Home?

Your country's embassy is a little piece of your country away from home. Things don't always go as planned. Team members get ill, passports get lost, vehicles get stolen, and occasionally teams get caught up in turmoils within the country they are visiting. Should you run into any problems while in the country, the first place you should go for help is your native embassy.

For travelers from the USA this means that it's important to know how to get in touch with the US Embassy within the country you will be visiting. Fortunately, the US government has streamlined this process by providing a website at usembassy.state.gov where you can easily find the contact information for US Embassies in any country around the world.

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Pity vs. Compassion

Jesus talked a lot about compassion. In Matthew 15:32-34 it says,

“Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ‘I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.’ His disciples answered, ‘Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?’ ‘How many loaves do you have?’ Jesus asked.”

Compassion is what Jesus had for these people. And today many of us, wanting to demonstrate compassion as well end up only taking pity on people. Believe me, there is a large difference between pity and compassion.

Compassion looks at life and the act of giving through the eyes of the Kingdom of God. Pity allows us to allay our conscience when we feel that there is an injustice and we just have to do something.

In most poverty stricken places around the world, I have found that the compassionate answer is to work with a local church and the pastor in particular to help the congregation excel in the grace of giving much like Paul calls for in 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9.

While I may feel guilty about all that I have in light of the poverty that surrounds me if I begin to give out of this deep seeded need to make me feel better I am not helping either myself or those around me.

A compassionate response is one that allows others to see gifts that come in as from God and not as from me. We need to work hard to break the dependency upon outside sources that we have created and allow them to become dependent upon God instead.

The disciples' response in Matthew fifteen is the same response that we usually have when we are stirred to a new level of awareness regarding the great spiritual and social needs in this world. We are often

overwhelmed with everything that is needed in order to accomplish these tasks and many times we simply wonder where to begin. And in wondering where to begin we often grab the closest thing to us, our wallets, our clothing, and our jewelry and begin handing them out randomly to people.

One of the best principles that I think we can derive from Matthew fifteen is that whenever we have the opportunity to be compassionate toward others it is done in such a way that causes people to draw more closely to God. Seeing Him in a unique way, seeing the answer of provision as having come from God not from me.

So how do we do that? Again I believe it comes down to intentionality and not randomness. We need to be intentionally working through local ministries to make sure that what is best for the Kingdom of God is done instead of simply doing something that makes me feel good at the moment.

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Coming Home

The trip is over, an experience you're convinced will live with you for the rest of your life. You've just impacted a community and there are people whose faces and needs are at the forefront of your mind.

And then you get on an airplane or climb back in the van and head for home. Upon arrival you notice that life has gone on without you. Those closest to you didn't have the experiences you had and they didn't meet the people you met. Everyone asks, "How was your trip?" And then after a brief response from you they change the subject to something that feels very unimportant in light of the life change you've just experienced. How frustrating.

So, how do you react when others don't really seem to care what is going on inside of you. How do you cope with the turmoil you feel inside as you try and

determine what your life should look like after experiencing the life that those less fortunate than you live out everyday?

There are three common reactions to returning home after an emotional cross-cultural experience. One reaction causes us to feel guilt and condemn ourselves for the extravagant lifestyles we perceive that we and others live. We immediately fall into a judgmental mindset that says, “How can you live with yourself now that you know how others are living?” You’re overcome with the sensation that one must sell everything they own and live a life of forced poverty. We begin comparing what we have with what we’ve just seen. And while it’s good to examine our lives and look for areas in which we can simplify we have to be careful that we do not impose a lifestyle on ourselves and on others that strangles us and takes away the joy of the gifts that God has given us.

Many living in the developing world that you just came from are asking God to bless them with what He has already blessed you with. It is wrong then for us to devalue the blessings that God has given you.

Another reaction upon returning home is one of apathy. That feeling that it's just good to be home. Ice in a glass whenever I want it, and a good shower. I can't get back into the old lifestyle fast enough. The trip was good. I enjoyed the sightseeing opportunities, and yes the people were nice. Overall, it was a fun experience but now I have to get back to my life. This reaction comes from experiencing short-term missions on a head level but misses out on the heart of the experience.

The third reaction is the one we all need to work toward. It is one that recognizes that nothing happened during this week that couldn't be replicated right here at home. What I did there, I can do at home. I now understand how little it takes to make someone happy. How little it takes to put a smile on someone's face; to share the gospel with someone. I could do that with my next-door neighbor, I could do that at the grocery store, at school or at work. There are needs within my community and my eyes have been opened to how easy it is to meet a need.

As a group leader it's important to discuss these reactions with your group. Help them understand

that as they return home, it's not uncommon to experience each of these reactions in one way or another.

Here are a few things that you can do upon returning home to continue getting the most out of your experience.

Know the #1 Question, "How was your trip?"

Everyone will ask you this question. Be prepared with a short answer that doesn't bore them. Leave room for them to ask more questions if they are interested.

Don't be offended if they say, "That's nice." and move on in the conversation. Remember, they didn't have the same experience you had, so it's not as important to them as it is to you.

Find a Processing Partner

Find a friend that will be willing to just sit and listen to you for 2 or 3 hours while you talk about your experiences. That time will allow you to hear yourself talk about the trip and you may discover some things that you didn't know you had learned. Remember, we often don't know what we think until we hear ourselves say it.

Plan what will change

On trips like these many people make important decisions to change things in their lives.

Unfortunately, some hope to change everything and then are frustrated when nothing changes. So, avoid that by planning one thing to change. Be specific and set goals. Find accountability and have someone help you make the changes you want to make in your life in response to the trip.

Don't let it end!

Even though the trip is "officially" over, you can keep it alive with two key activities: First, by praying consistently for those people you met along the way. And second, by becoming an advocate for missions. Talk about the trip and how it changed you. Talk about the needs you saw. Inspire others to take action by getting involved.

Write a prayer letter.

Take time to write a letter to all of the people who helped make the trip possible for you. Tell them about your experiences and about what God did in your life.

Ask them to continue praying for you as God continues to show you how to be involved in Missions.

My challenge to you, as a group, is for you to make the most of what you've just experienced. Long after your pictures have made it into a scrapbook, my prayer is, that you'll continue to pray for the people of the country you've just ministered to. That your life will be forever changed. That you will begin to recognize that there are opportunities around you every day to make a difference. And that you will use what God has blessed you with to impact those around you and the world for His kingdom.

