

7 Reasons You Should Go on a Short-Term Mission Trip

This past week I traveled with 18 Americans to a part of rural Guatemala that I've visited seven times in 11 years. Our multi-generational team from Florida included a college professor, a lawyer, a salesman, a private school teacher, several teens and a 31-year-old veteran of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Only one of our team members could speak Spanish fluently and a few had never been out of the United States before.

The climate was hot, the food was strange and communication was a challenge. But the inconveniences didn't dampen anyone's spirits. The people on our team dug a foundation for a church building, prayed for people at the conclusion of many services, played soccer with local youth, hugged lots of kids, performed dramas, visited local families in their homes and made lifelong friends.

Not everyone can pack up all their belongings and become career missionaries, but many of us can go on short-term mission trips. If you've never tried it, I encourage you to consider these benefits of taking the compassion of Jesus to another culture:

1. You will encounter God's heart. Our God is big and He cares about the nations. He's a global God. And His ultimate goal is to gather a family that represents "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). When you step into a foreign mission field, you will sense God's amazing compassion for another culture and you will begin to know Him as Lord of the harvest.

2. You will expand your limited perspective. Too many of us are stuck in spiritual ruts. Even pastors can get bored with

the sameness of ministry in one community. Every now and then you need to step out of your comfort zone and allow God to stretch you. Experience how other Christians worship God with fervor. Discover how they plant churches and engage in evangelism. Recognize that the way we do ministry in the United States is not necessarily the only way. And expect to learn from the people you are going to minister to.

3. You will become more grateful. I receive an attitude adjustment every time I go to another country—especially when I am with poorer Christians. Whether I am eating papayas and frijoles in Guatemala, sleeping on an uncomfortable bed in Uganda or riding in an all-night train in India, I come back from my trips with a renewed appreciation for life's little blessings—air conditioning, running water, nice roads and flush toilets. There's nothing like spending time with a family of seven in a house made of mud and straw to put your puny problems in perspective.

4. You will discover your spiritual family. When you minister alongside Christians in another country, you find that the Holy Spirit bonds us together supernaturally. In the community I visited this week in eastern Guatemala, there are people who have become like family members to me because of our spiritual connection. These relationships can last a lifetime. This is the same type of bond the apostle Paul felt with the people he met in Greece, Italy and Asia Minor during his travels.

5. You will build lasting partnerships. God gives us this strong bond so we will link arms and work for a common purpose across racial and cultural lines. I encourage churches to send teams to the same place annually to foster permanent relationships and effective projects. Expect God to link your church with a community overseas. Your connection to the same people over time can lead to the planting of a church, an orphanage, a shelter for women or a school.

6. You will overcome your fears. One woman on our team this

week had never prayed at a church altar for people—and she felt totally inadequate because of her limited knowledge of Spanish. But when people streamed to the front of the church she swallowed her fears and did what her flesh didn't want to do. Instead of running like Jonah she poured her life out for the precious people we came to reach. I guarantee she will have more spiritual confidence when she gets back home. Sometimes you have to run to the front of the battle line to get new courage.

7. You will expand the kingdom of Jesus. The Great Commission was not a suggestion. Christ's kingdom cannot be built without bold, radical obedience to Matthew 28:19: "Go therefore..." Somebody has to GO. There's no way around it. To share the gospel with the whole world, we must be willing to pack our bags sometime and leave home.

Of course not everyone can hop on a plane and go to a foreign country for 10 days. Some people have health limitations or family pressures that make travel impractical. Don't feel guilty if you are in that category. Instead remember that those who can't go to the mission field physically can go through prayer or financial support. And the reward will be the same.

When David defeated the Amalekites, he gave the same reward to the warriors who stayed behind to watch the baggage as he gave to the frontline soldiers who wielded swords (see 1 Sam. 30:22-25).

So, whether you go virtually or in person, let's recognize the priority of missions. Let's encourage every Christian to discover their role in God's great plan to tell everyone about Jesus and His love.

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