

Leave Your Entitlement at Home When Heading to the Mission Field

I'm currently on my 29th mission trip to Africa. In fact, I'm sending this column from Malawi, a country that has become very dear to my heart. Since I surrendered to a call to missions while I was editor of Charisma, I've visited 39 nations and developed relationships with dozens of pastors and leaders who now consider me their friend and brother.

Missions is at the heart of our Christian faith, and I believe every church should be actively engaged in it. But there's a right way and a wrong way to do mission work. I've learned from my own mistakes, and I've also seen some sad examples of short-term missions gone awry. If you are considering a short-term or long-term mission trip, please avoid these pitfalls:

Don't act like a spoiled American. If you're traveling to a developing country, prepare for delays, cold showers, big bugs, power outages, unusual toilets, bad roads and strange food. Make a decision before you leave that you won't let one complaint come out of your mouth. Be flexible and gracious. Focus on the positive, soak in the beauty of the country and come home with a renewed gratitude for your blessings at home.

Don't talk down to people. You are not going overseas to teach poor, ignorant foreigners what you know. If that's your attitude, stay home! You are going to serve. Most of what I know about ministry I learned from humble people I met in other countries. Whether you are teaching, preaching, building orphanages or feeding the poor, get under the people and wash their feet. And expect to learn powerful lessons from the people you are visiting.

Never build relationships based on money. People in poor

countries tend to think all Americans are rich, and they will be tempted to look to us instead of God to provide. Don't wave money around, don't flaunt expensive watches or jewelry, and don't hand out cash to everyone you meet. Let your new friends know you want a real friendship with them that doesn't hinge on finances.

Never make demands. I know of a preacher who told his host he needed a hotel room that cost \$1,000 a night—in a nation where most people live in cramped, Soviet-style apartments. The apostle Paul modeled a different approach, and he was willing to live among people at their level (see 1 Thess. 2:9-10). If Jesus was willing to enter this world in a filthy manger, you should be willing to set aside your expensive tastes.

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Never take team members who are not committed to Jesus. I know of a young man who went on a mission trip to Africa with his church and ended up getting a local girl pregnant. How does that happen? Anyone who goes with you on a trip needs a background check and a pastor's recommendation. Mission trips are not opportunities for immature or backslidden Christians looking for adventure. The behavior of your team members should honor Christ.

Never work with people overseas without investigating them. I get frequent requests from foreign pastors who want me to visit their church, support their programs or do evangelistic crusades in their villages. In Pakistan, some unscrupulous Christians troll the internet looking for churches that will send them money. Some people posing as pastors talk naïve Americans into wiring funds for a trip—and then they vanish. If you want to do mission work, you need discernment. Don't get bamboozled by a con artist posing as "beloved brother Najib."

Don't use a "hit and run" approach to missions. When I visit a country, I almost always end up going back because I build lasting relationships. I'm on my third trip to Malawi now, and I want to come back next year. Mission work should be a long-term partnership. If your church is planning to start a mission program, don't just scatter your seed here and there. Prayerfully invest in a few places and let the Holy Spirit connect you with people for a lifetime.

Never misrepresent your work. We laugh about the preacher who was "evangelistically speaking" about the crowds he attracted in Zambia. But exaggeration is lying. There's nothing more obnoxious than a Christian who inflates statistics to draw attention or raise funds. If you build your ministry on half-truths you will have cracks in your foundation. Be honest, be accountable and tell the truth.



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(see Acts 8:26-29).
Sometimes, reaching him on e is more powerful than reaching many.

I hope you will become more passionate about taking the message of Christ to the world. But as you pack your bags, leave your unneeded baggage at home and go overseas with a humble, teachable heart.

The mission field is ripe, and we must make disciples the way Jesus did, Lee Grady says in his book, Follow Me.

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