

MISSION TRIP PREP ESSENTIALS:

Respectful Service



25 YEARS OF CHRIST-CENTERED MISSION TRIPS

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK

For more than 25 years, YouthWorks has facilitated mission trips for middle and high school students. This year alone, we will welcome over 21,000 teenagers into 45+ communities to experience healthy and sustainable short-term missions that center on principles of respectful service.

We care deeply about respectful service. In fact, respectful service is one of our core values as an organization. This value reads:

God is already at work in individuals, churches and communities, and we use Jesus' example of servant-leadership to join the work. Throughout our partnership with a community, we listen closely, speak carefully and serve humbly. Respectful service may feel less efficient, but we believe it is more effective and life-giving.

Through our experience facilitating short-term mission trips we have learned a lot of lessons about respectful service—sometimes through mistakes but also through success. We know that, without intentionality and thoughtfulness, missions can end up hurting the people they are intended to help. But we also know that this hurt can be minimized and avoided altogether.

This guidebook is a summary of the things we've learned about respectful service. We are the first to admit that we still mess up sometimes and fail to serve respectfully. However, it is our hope and prayer to intentionally lean into our value of respectful service and encourage others in the church to do the same.

There are many ways to use this resource, but here are some suggestions:

- ▶ **Read each chapter on your own or with a key leader on your trip.** Each chapter is meant to touch on how to do respectful service at every point of your trip: before, during and after. Read and process these ideas before your trip, so you can be a step ahead of those you lead.
- ▶ **Reflect with the Processing Questions.** Spend a few minutes responding to the questions in this guidebook to help you think through respectful service for your mission trip. Work through them on your own first, and then use them to create intentional conversations with your team.
- ▶ **Implement the activities with your group before, during and after your trip.** This is where processing meets practical application. Respectful service doesn't just happen all by itself, but needs intentionality from you and your team at every stage of the trip.

Thank you for caring about respectful service. We hope this resource helps to deepen your understanding on the topic and will influence the way you and your students interact with service opportunities in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HELPING AND HURTING

When done well, short-term mission trips bring students and communities together. These trips can connect us with the movements of God and bring faith to our fingertips. Every community - the ones we visit and the ones we come from - have both strengths and struggles. By entering a new town or city, we get an inside view of another context where Jesus is at work.

Hearing this, might make you want to go on a mission trip right now! But wait. What happens when we don't do mission trips well? Sometimes, we can miss the mark. Short-term mission trips can become more about us than the people we serve. We can forget about our own brokenness and focus on the brokenness of others.

In fact, there are many ways to hurt communities during a short-term mission trip. These things are not meant to scare or shame you, rather to highlight the seriousness of doing mission trips well.

SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIPS CAN HURT PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES WHEN WE...

- Follow our own agenda, rather than the agenda of the people we serve
- Have savior complexes
- Offend the community by not understanding the local culture
- Understand poverty simply as a lack of material possessions
- Use a paternalistic approach to service (doing work for people who can do it for themselves), thus demeaning those we mean to serve
- Make ourselves (and not God) the hero
- Make the trip about what we do than about what we learn or who we meet
- Think we, as outsiders, bring hope to a community
- Make the trips more about us than the people we serve

This list is illustrative rather than exhaustive, but as you can see, it is so important to do these mission trips well! One way to do them well is to focus on respectful service.

RESPECTFUL SERVICE IS...

- Seeing all people as sons and daughters of the King
- Seeing beauty in all people and embracing our mutual brokenness
- Seeing our work as a part of God's bigger story, not the end in itself
- Sometimes relational over material, putting an emphasis on people over projects
- Stopping and listening
- Setting aside your own agenda and efficiency for the sake of someone else (just like Jesus!)
- Broadening perspectives through relationships
- Culturally sensitive, being aware of both the historical and immediate context of the community
- Trusting the community to know what is best
- Squashing the savior complex

The following chapters contain principals, questions and activities to help you learn and live out respectful service before, during and after your mission trip.

- CHAPTER 1 -

Respectful Service Before Your Trip

It matters how you enter a community for a short-term mission trip. Work to enter the community as a learner with a teachable spirit. This means taking a posture of watching, listening and asking questions. The community you serve is not your home. Respectfully enter the community as it is someone else's home.

DEFINING POVERTY

Sometimes the work we do, although well-intentioned, perpetuates perceptions of inferiority in those we serve. Many mission trips are in communities that are considered low-income or poor. However, we have a limited definition of the word "poor". Often, we define poverty as lacking material goods or possessions. To serve communities well, we need to expand our definition of poverty. As a result of sin, we all experience poverty. We are all poor, broken people in need of a savior to come and restore us. We have broken relationships with God, ourselves and other people. By expanding this definition, we can level the playing field and embrace our mutual brokenness.

HOW ARE YOU PLANNING TO SERVE?

It is best practice to serve communities by supporting existing ministries or organizations that are already established in the community. Since short-term mission trips are well... short-term... it is imperative to consider how your work will be continued after you leave.

A great goal for your trip is to partner with people already in the community to offer support and help further their work. While there might be other things that you could do that would offer a "greater impact" on the community, watch out—this mentality can easily make it more about you than the community. It is important to not to take away local jobs by providing free labor or begin a program that cannot be sustained once the trip is over. Short-term mission trips cannot have community development as a realistic goal.

You may need to reframe a few things before you begin your mission trip. Try to avoid having a savior-complex. You are not in the community to fix it. Only God can truly offer that type of restoration. Remember you are not bringing God into this community—he is already there! We need to see our service as participating in the greater work of God in the community. Every place has something to offer. Prepare yourself to find out what the community will offer you and your students during your mission trip.

Now that you know a little more about respectful service, it's time to make a specific plan to put this in action for your mission trip. Planning mission trips can be a lot of work, even when you let someone else manage the logistics. Use the chart below to think through how you will prioritize respectful service for your trip.

Start here if you're organizing a trip with a MISSIONS ORGANIZATION	Start here if you're organizing a trip ON YOUR OWN
<p>If you choose to outsource the logistics of your trip to a short-term mission organization, do some research ahead of time. Not all organizations value respectful service in the same way. Before committing to any specific organization, try and answer the following:</p>	<p>Many churches have sister-congregations or long-standing partnerships in other communities—that is great! If your church has the resources to plan your own mission trips, respectful service should still be a critical consideration. Try and answer the following:</p>
<p>How does this organization approach the topic of respectful service?</p>	<p>Are you connecting with a local organization or church for your trip?</p>
<p>How does the organization partner with the community? What is their relationship with this community?</p>	<p>How are you entering the community? Were you invited? Do you already have an established relationship in the community? Has the community been consulted about hosting your short-term mission group?</p>
<p>Do the service experiences build on programs that are initiated and sustained by the community?</p>	<p>How do you know the needs of the community? How are you getting this information? Do the service experiences build on programs that are initiated and sustained by the community?</p>
<p>Are there intentional learning opportunities to deepen your understanding of the people and place you are serving?</p>	<p>How are you intentionally learning from the community during your trip?</p>

Regardless of who plans your mission trip, critically think through your group's motivation for going on the trip in the first place. Consider the following questions and jot some notes in the spaces provided:

1. Why are you going on a trip—is it about you, the people you serve or both?
2. Who are the specific people, and what organizations, are you there to support?
3. Who will carry on the work when you leave?

POST-IT ACTIVITY:

This activity demonstrates that we all have assets and we all have needs. Take about 20 minutes to do the following:

Instructions:

1. Give each person five yellow post-its and three blue post-its (any colors will work).
2. Have them take three minutes to write down things they have to offer on the yellow post-its—one thing per post-it.
 - a. **A FEW EXAMPLES:**
 - i. I am tall so I can reach things
 - ii. I speak Spanish
 - iii. I am a good listener
3. On the blue post-its write down things they need help with—one thing per post-it.
 - a. **A FEW EXAMPLES:**
 - i. I need help with my math homework
 - ii. I need help reaching the top shelf
 - iii. I need someone to listen
4. Once you have done this, put all the post-its on the wall.
5. Have everyone walk around and read the post-its and try and match blue and yellow post-its that go together. ("I am a good listener" goes with "I need someone to listen") Stick these together on the wall, but make sure you can still see both papers.

6. Once you have paired up all of the post-it notes you can find, discuss the following questions together:
 - a. How does this activity parallel with us entering a community for our mission trip?
 - b. What are some initial assumptions we have about the community?
 - c. How might the community feel if we only saw the needs but didn't see what they had to offer?
 - d. What happens to the needs that are unmet? Or when we leave for the week?
 - e. In light of this discussion, what are ways that we can enter the community well?

LEARNING ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

We can't serve respectfully without knowing about the people and the places we serve. A pre-trip meeting is a great setting to collectively learn more about the local language, culture and history of the community you will serve. Here are some tangible ideas on how to do this:

1. If you are working with a mission organization to plan your trip, call and ask questions about the community. They will likely have people in their organization who reside in or regularly visit the communities. They can provide you with specific information or resources to share with your group.
2. If you are going to a community that speaks another language, take time to learn a few key phrases. This still applies when traveling to communities within the United States.
3. Have your students take ownership in learning about the community. Assign them to research an aspect of the local language, culture or history to present to the group.
4. If you have connections to the places you are serving, ask someone to come speak to your group.

A word of caution: when learning about a community, it is easy to highlight negative things such as crime or poverty. While those things are a part of a community, don't miss the history, local heroes, and the overall picture of good and beautiful things that are also there.

- CHAPTER 2 -

Respectful Service During Your Trip

You made it to your mission trip—awesome! It should quickly become obvious that planning for respectful service *before* your trip isn't quite enough. You have to serve respectfully during your trip as well!

During your mission trip, find some time to check in with your group every day. Many things happen during a day of service; tiring things, funny things, outrageous things. When you meet with your group; laugh and process together. Try incorporating some of the pre-trip activities and discussions into these debriefing conversations to help make connections between theory and practice.

WHO DESERVES OUR SERVICE?

Right now, take stock of the people you've met on your mission trip so far. Maybe you've met people who have expressed authentic gratitude for your sacrifice of time, money and energy. These people deserve our love and service, right? But what about the people who don't react in quite the same way—the child who refuses to listen or the person who doesn't thank you for your help?

Sometimes we expect people to act a certain way, and we start believing that service is only for those who have earned and deserve it. This is not true. Authentic service is born from love – a free gift that doesn't depend on the person receiving it. Remember, Jesus didn't discriminate when he offered his ultimate gift of service—his very life. In the same way, we too should freely give!

"But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." (ROMANS 5:8)

We didn't deserve Jesus' ultimate act of service. When we serve others, we can take joy in the opportunity to be like Jesus, regardless of the response.

Discussion questions for your group:

1. How have people reacted to your service so far? Are they thankful, neutral, indifferent?
2. Even if the person you serve doesn't respond in the way you expect, how can you choose to serve joyfully?
3. Read Romans 5:6-11. What do you think this passage means? How does remembering Jesus' free gift for you change the way you imagine serving others?

STOP, LISTEN AND LEARN

When I was in fourth grade, my teacher passed out a worksheet that had a list of 20 instructions. My teacher told us we would only have two minutes to read the worksheet and follow the instructions. Eager to get started, I looked at the paper to begin. The first instruction was "read all of the instructions". After reading the entire list, I saw it was filled with silly instructions: crumple your paper, flatten your paper, write out the numbers 1-100, etc. The very last instruction said, "ignore the rest of these instructions and put your pencil down". I stopped and put down my pencil.

Looking around the room, I did not see the same response. More concerned with speed than with accuracy, most of my classmates were working through the list of pointless instructions—and for what? They ended up doing a list of tasks that were completely unnecessary.

Your mission trip experience has much higher stakes than a simple worksheet from fourth grade, but the idea is the same. We need to slow down to take time to truly listen.

Real listening is hard. It may seem slow, inefficient and challenging. These difficulties are further compounded when we communicate with someone from a different cultural or historical background. Respectful service is saying yes to these types of challenges.

So much damage can occur when we follow our own agenda, far more damage than incorrectly completing a worksheet. There is no way we, as visitors to a community, know more about what the community needs. That is silly! We need to avoid this at all costs.

Open your mind to new ideas of service. Sometimes respectful service is not doing anything at all, rather it is sitting, listening and learning. The communities we serve provide a particular context for ministry and the same model for ministry will not work in all places. Take time to listen and learn what is truly needed.

Discussion questions for your group:

1. On the trip so far, has listening ever seemed slow, inefficient or challenging? In what ways?
2. How have you been able to serve someone by listening to them?
3. Have the service opportunities this week met your expectations? Why or why not?
4. How can you move beyond your expectations to serve the community respectfully?

SQUASH THE SAVIOR COMPLEX

When serving on your mission trip, you and your students may experience feelings of accomplishment or satisfaction when helping other people. While this isn't inherently a bad thing, tread lightly. It is easy when working with people of a different socioeconomic background to compare the things you have with the things they don't, further distancing you from the people you serve. This perceived power differential can create unintended feelings of superiority towards the people you are serving. In reality, every single person that has ever lived has experienced brokenness. In Romans 3:23 Paul writes that, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". All of us. The reality is that you need as much help as the person you are helping.

When serving in communities with significant financial poverty, it is easy to think that money is the answer. With more money, opportunity or freedoms, it's easy to believe that we are in the best position to "rescue" those in financial need, but again, here's the reality: We are all lost. We are all in desperate need of rescue. The only one that is truly able to deal with our hopeless state is Jesus. We ALL need a Savior to save us from our brokenness, we don't save anybody, Jesus saves. He is the great equalizer.

Romans 8:38-39 says: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We all need that kind of Savior in our lives. In the Kingdom of God, we all experience the same brokenness. But praise God! We can all experience the same great redemption. Let's leave the saving to someone who does it a lot better than we ever could.

Discussion questions for your group:

1. What forms can brokenness take – both internal and external?
2. Where does brokenness exist in this community and where does it exist in your home community?
3. How has this community and your home community experienced redemption?
4. Who did the redeeming?

- CHAPTER 3 -

Respectful Service After Your Trip

The mission trip is over. The suitcase is unpacked. Laundry is done. You have sufficiently caught up on sleep. So, now what? Respectful service after your mission trip may not seem as intuitive or obvious as when you are out serving in a community. However, it is imperative to keep respectful service at the forefront of your trip processing, storytelling and future service.

FIND LONG-TERM IN THE SHORT-TERM

When done well, short term mission trips can create experiences that broaden perspectives, ignite passions, expose possibilities and inspire pursuits. Often these are the reasons we go on mission trips in the first place. Short-term mission experiences have the potential to inspire some people to become life-long missionaries. However, this isn't necessarily the outcome for most short-term mission participants and that is OK. Finding long-term ways to serve and support a community can happen anywhere and take many forms.

During your mission trip, you most-likely served alongside a local ministry or organization in the community. While your time of service was short, you were helping to play a role in the longevity of something greater. Now that you are back home, think through ways to continue to serve and support things you started on your trip.

With your group:

Come up with a list of ideas for ways to support the community you visited on your mission trip.

There are endless possibilities, but here are a few suggestions:

- ▶ Communicate with the local ministry for a monthly list of prayer requests. Pray for these things every week at youth group
- ▶ Support the ministry partner's fundraising initiative
- ▶ Coordinate a mid-year visit to the ministry partner
- ▶ Coordinate a Christmas toy-drive

- ▶ Consider returning to the same community for a mission trip next year...maybe also the year after that?
- ▶ Check if there is local chapter of an organization you served on your trip. For example, there are branches of Habitat Restore, Boys and Girls Club and Salvation Army in many communities across the country.

Remember to communicate with the community ahead of time regarding their specific needs and requests. Always ask, never assume.

SHARE STORIES WELL

How you tell the story of your mission trip matters. Sharing about the experiences is an important processing tool for your mission trip, especially for young people.

When done well, story-sharing requires thoughtfulness. Are you highlighting the strengths or the struggles of the community? In the same vein, who is the hero of your stories? Are your stories about things you did or about the things God did through you? He, after all should be the hero of every story.

Ever read The Onion? It's a satirical news source that makes up fake news stories. They once published an article titled, "6-Day Visit to Rural African Village Completely Changes Woman's Facebook Profile Picture". It's ironic, right? An experience that is supposed to be transformative and life-changing, in the end boils down to a small act of self-promotion.

Like the woman in the headline, we want to avoid taking the powerful narrative of what God is doing in the world and make it into a small story that puts us at the center.

Every trip participant has a story to tell, so tell it! Just make sure to be thoughtful and stay committed to the value of respectful service as you think of what to say and how to say it. It is simply about consciously thinking about the story we are telling.

Discussion questions for your group:

1. What do you think of the headline from The Onion?
2. Why is it funny and why is it sad?
3. How might this connect with your mission trip?
4. What are 2 or 3 positive and inspiring things about the people and the place you served?
5. How did God move during your mission trip?

RESPECTFUL SERVICE AT HOME

For teenagers (and maybe even adults) a common response of the impact of mission trips is usually something like, “I am much more thankful for what I have.”

A great phenomenon of mission trips is that teenagers start to recognize that there are people in this world who go without some of the things we might take for granted every day – job opportunities, solid education, food in the fridge, working appliances, a home, a support system, consistent care, encouragement... and the list goes on. Some of us never thought about the reality of going without these things, and when that reality is brought before our eyes, it can be shocking. We often respond with knee-jerk gratitude for the good things in life, which is a perfectly reasonable reaction to inequality.

However, when teenagers have an incredibly rich service experience, thankfulness should not be the grand finale. Rather, thankfulness should be the opening act.

Often when the Bible directs us to be thankful, it is in the context of telling us to do something (Col. 4:2. Col, 3:15, 1 Thes. 5:18). Thankfulness is not the end, but the beginning of a path toward authentic worship, humble (and respectful!) service and deeper love.

Respectful service is an understanding that you don’t have to travel hundreds or thousands of miles to be like Jesus in someone else’s life. You can serve in the same or similar ways in your own community.

Mission trips are meant to be a catalyst that will propel you forward – a drawing back of the bow, a wind up for the pitch, a launch pad experience. Your mission trip is not a grand finale to a year of going to church, but a beautiful beginning to deepened service and love for others.

It takes intentionality to take the “mountain-top moment” of your mission trip and turn it into an actual life-changing event. Here are some questions for you and your group to discern ways to be involved in your home community:

1. On your mission trip, did you find yourself caring about something you didn’t expect?
2. Did you discover any new passions?
3. Where can you serve at home that help you pursue those passions?

Create some SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely) goals for your group’s commitment to serve back home. These goals can even serve to be a culture-setter to make local, respectful service a regular part of the rhythm of your youth group.

Engaging in respectful service wherever we are takes intentionality, humility and commitment. We are thankful that you want to serve respectfully and hope that this guidebook helps you do just that. We believe respectful service is the only kind worth doing and are committed to our own learning process so we can keep doing it better. We are glad to be on this journey with you!

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