



By:
Standards of Excellence
In Short-Term Mission

A 14-Day Pre-Trip Devotional

Missions for the Long Haul

Day 1

Scripture

Colossians 1:28-29

28 He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. 29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

I laugh when people talk about short-term mission trips as a new phenomenon. After all, the Apostle Paul himself was a short-term missionary! Have you ever thought of that? You are participating in the Great Commission in the tradition of the Apostle Paul!

Paul, however, had a different perspective on his mission trips than many people today. Many of us sign up for a short-term mission trip, prepare for 6-8 months, and then go on the trip. We take photos and tell people about it, and then seamlessly transition back into the life to which we are accustomed. To the average Christian, a short-term mission is just a trip. It has a start and an end.

To Paul, though, his trip may have been short, but his mission never ended.

Paul's mission is to proclaim Jesus by presenting EVERYONE fully mature in Christ. Note there is no qualifier here. Paul's mission doesn't just apply to those he meets on his trip; it's not restricted to a certain nationality or ethnicity, and not even confined simply to those who don't know Christ.

As you approach your trip, consider everyone in your life as part of your mission; this includes the supporters you talk to before you leave, the person sitting next to you on the plane, the taxi driver, hotel employee, and those with whom you minister directly. Not only that, but also your mission doesn't end when you return. Your mission field includes your co-workers, neighbors, friends, and family members.

It's worth it to note, too, how Paul approaches his mission. Paul strives with all of Christ's strength that everyone may become fully mature in Christ. The same should be true of you. Your mission is worth striving for—not with your own strength—but with that of Christ.

If you are going to maintain a positive testimony at all times, through all situations, and for the long-haul of your life, you'll need to access Christ's strength day by day, and sometimes even moment by moment.

As you live out your mission, don't forget to anchor yourself to the living God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Spend time with the Lord in prayer and the Word, training your heart to hear His voice and follow Him more closely.

Pray and Journal:

Take a moment to pray and make a plan for how you will stay anchored to the Almighty God accessing Christ's strength so you can live on mission at all times and in all things.

Shine Like Stars

Day 2

Scripture:

Philippians 2:14-15

14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky.

When I was in university, I spent my summer and winter breaks working at a casual sit-down restaurant called Red Robin. I had a co-worker named Tommy and I have to admit he was not a nice guy. Most people tolerated him, but I don't know of anyone who liked him!

Tommy complained about everyone, his guests, his tips, his co-workers, no one was safe. On one occasion, he was so upset with the guests at his table that he took a handful of their french fries and dragged them across the floor before putting them back in the basket!

One year, however, I came home from university and resumed working at Red Robin. I heard people talking about Tommy. They were saying such nice things; I thought they must have hired a new person with the same name, but they hadn't! That evening when we worked together, Tommy was totally different! He was nice to everyone, helped his co-workers without even being asked, and—most noticeably—didn't complain about a single thing.

I finally asked a co-worker during a break, “What happened to Tommy? He's like a different person?” Her response was, “He became a Christian!” Tommy's life had totally changed, and he was impacting the people around him by doing one simple thing—not complaining.

Philippians 2:14-15 tells us to do everything without complaining. What will happen if we do? Verse 15 says if you live a life free of complaining, you will shine like stars in the universe. Have you ever thought about why you can see stars? Stars are still there during the day, but you can see them at night because of the dark background.

If you choose to follow this simple command—do everything without complaining—you will stand out from those around you like the stars stand out in the universe. Think about that! A star is so bright that its light can travel for more than four years and still be seen! A life like that is an extraordinary life!

But it won't be easy. You won't avoid complaining by simply biting your tongue or trying to ignore your circumstances. You will eventually blow up! There is a way to do this, though, and it's found by flipping the page in your Bible to Philippians 4:13. Paul says he can do “***all things through Christ who gives him strength***” and so can you!

Pray and Journal:

Take some time to pray and ask God to reveal how you complain. Maybe you complain verbally, through body language, or some other subtle way. Then ask Him to give you His strength and stand on that promise! Consider memorizing these verses from Philippians to help you shine like stars in the universe!

Honor Your Leaders

Day 3

Scripture:

Hebrews 13:17

17 Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

Several years ago, I was leading a mission trip from our church in Mexico. One morning our team divided into groups and went with other believers from the church to serve elderly widows in the community. Our group was tasked with cleaning up the property and painting the house of an elderly woman raising her grandchildren.

The pastor of the church came with us to make introductions, and to get us situated with our supplies and assignment. He then left to do the same thing for the other groups. Before he left, though, he made sure that one of the men from the church was equipped to lead after he left.

At one point, we were painting and weren't sure if they wanted us to paint in and around the bars covering her windows. The brother from the church in charge told us to go ahead and reach through the bars to paint around the window.

I remember thinking that this was not a good idea as I thought we'd end up getting paint on the bars and said something to my wife about it. She immediately reminded me of Hebrews 13:17 and asked if I shouldn't have more confidence in the leader and submit to what he thought was best.

I realize the stakes in this story are very low—just paint on some bars—but the principle of submission remains.

Why didn't I want to do it his way? As I wrestled with this question, I find myself answering a more fundamental one. "Why should I submit to my leader?"

The Lord spoke clearly and immediately to my heart. Who am I to tell him how to do the job? What do I know about and what experience do I have painting houses in Mexico? I'm going to be gone in a few days, but this man will continue on. And, in the end, how hypocritical is it to say, "I'm here to serve" and then refuse when asked to do so? This was not an issue of paint on some bars but an issue of submission.

Hebrews 13:17 instructs us to do everything our leader asks. We do this because our leader—whether it be a team leader or host—is somehow accountable on a level that we aren't. In some way, we owe our leaders submission. Additionally, we want to be a blessing and not a burden. This is not only better for our leader but also better for us. I think you'll find that, when you're a blessing to your host, you will get to experience the country and the culture in a special way you would not have otherwise.

Pray and Journal:

Take a few moments to pray about this idea of submission. Ask God to reveal areas of stubbornness and pride. Memorize Hebrews 13:17 as a reminder to do everything you're asked.

Serve Like Christ

Day 4

Scripture:

Mark 10:43-45

43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Some years back, I went on a mission trip to southern Italy. We were participating in a nine-night evangelistic festival in conjunction with two local churches. The festival ran from about 5-10 pm and thousands of people attended each night.

This was a big commitment for the host churches as they needed more than 100 volunteers each night to make the festival happen. It's easy to give up nine nights when you've put life on hold by taking time off work to travel to another country, but the church members had no such luxury. They still had the responsibilities of taking care of their children, homes, jobs, and so on.

One of the first days we were there, we saw one of the church members in our hotel. She was one of the maids! As we talked, we learned that the presence of our large group was requiring her to work more than usual, which she was happy to do. However, she was hoping to still be off in time to make it to the festival to volunteer and to accompany unsaved friends she had invited.

After the conversation, our team leader reminded the whole team of how important it would be to keep our hotel rooms clean and orderly. The easier we could make her job, the more likely it would be that she could get to the festival at night and volunteer at HER church's ministry.

Despite all our talk about being servants prior to the trip, I hadn't anticipated that one of the primary ways to serve was to keep my room clean. After all, the last thing I wanted to do was to cause this sweet lady to resent our presence because it kept her from being able to serve.

As I reflect on the nature of service, I think we often romanticize terms like “servant leadership” or simply talk about “serving like Christ.” However, service is usually anything but glorious to us. When we think of serving like Jesus we might want to imagine the long hours teaching, the crowds pressing in hoping to be healed, or the stormy boat rides. Instead, we probably ought to think about Jesus washing stinky, sweaty feet, interacting with a disfigured and smelly man with leprosy, and even subjecting himself to torture and death.

I've learned that while serving others can bring fulfillment, it's rarely glorious. It's usually unnoticed, thankless, and even unpleasant. Service usually looks like taking the back seat, letting others eat first, or leaving a place cleaner than you found it.

Pray and Journal:

Finish your time today by asking God for three things:

1. The desire to serve.
2. The ability to see opportunities to serve; and
3. The grace to humbly and joyfully serve.

Working as Unto the Lord

Day 5

Scripture:

Colossians 3:23-24

23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

One of my favorite parts of my job is getting to help mission teams prepare for their trip. Our philosophy of training is “we’d rather have you fail here and succeed there than succeed here and fail there.” This means that everything we do is intentional. It also means that we try to give opportunities for people to apply what they are learning as they learn it.

One time I was training a group that was going to France. The group did not do very well at applying the lessons I was teaching throughout the weekend. In the final activity, the team was given 12 nails, and they were to balance them simultaneously on one nail that was driven into a small piece of 2 x 4.

The group tried a few failing strategies and then asked, “Is this even possible?” I answered their question with a question of my own, “Why do you ask?” No response. They worked on it a little bit longer and began to ask if they could give up. I encouraged them to try a bit longer, and they did.

After a few more failing attempts, the group began to complain and got very agitated. One woman in particular declared, “If we are going to have to stack nails on this trip, then I’m clearly not fit for the team!”

Eventually we reached our time limit, and I brought the time to a close. In their agitation, I asked them why they thought I might have had them do an activity that seemed to have no purpose in preparing for their mission trip. Again, they had no answer.

We finally talked about the fact that we often are asked to do things that don’t seem to make sense. Perhaps the task seems irrelevant, or the method seems sloppy and inefficient. You know you shouldn’t complain but do everything you’re asked and serve like Jesus, and this just seems like a waste of time. Why would I come all this way and pay all this money to do (fill in the blank)?

However, just because something doesn’t appear to have a purpose, it doesn’t make it so. Our lack of experience, cultural understanding, or kingdom perspective could all be factors when we question the validity of our task. In fact, it’s likely that the task does make sense, we just can’t see the reason.

Most importantly, though, Colossians 3:23-24 teaches us that everything we do is a task from the Lord, and so we should work at it with all of our hearts. Our motivation comes not from what we are doing but for whom we are doing it! The cherry on top is that if we do this, we will receive a reward from the Lord—a far better reward than we would otherwise receive!

Pray and Journal:

Close today by praying and asking the Lord to allow you to work with purity of heart as unto Him in all situations.

Spiritual Dependency

Day 6

Scripture:

John 15:5

5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Matthew 19:26

26 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

About three years into full-time ministry, I remember standing in my kitchen and doing the dishes while looking out the window and watching the sun set over the desert. It felt somehow metaphorical for the season of my life, the sun setting over the desert.

When I started with the organization I was working for, I was sure that God would do great things and that all my lofty dreams would come true because, “with man this is impossible but with God all things are possible” (Matt 19:26). However, things hadn’t worked out the way I had assumed. My support was yet again too low, and my ministry didn’t seem to be bearing fruit. I was in the desert, figuratively speaking, wondering when the sun would set on my ministry, and I would be released.

In my despair, God brought John 15:5 to mind. While I believe God would do great things, was I abiding in Him? Was I trying to accomplish my goals with God or apart from Him? As I stood there washing dishes, I realized that it was the latter. While I may have been doing all the right things, was I doing it from an attitude of dependence on God in unity with Him? In that moment, I realized that I might not need to change what I’m doing, but the way I’m going about it.

John 15:5 is urging us to make sure we approach our mission properly. Your first job as a missionary is to abide in Christ, to treasure Christ, to hold Him near in prayer and the Word, and to depend on Him day by day.

Therefore, the best thing you can do to prepare for your mission trip is to cultivate a spiritual dependency on God that is sustained through daily time with Him. No matter how much money you raise, how perfect your logistics, or how well prepared you are for your ministry tasks, your mission will yield no fruit if it is apart from God. Stated another way, if you only have five minutes to prepare, prepare spiritually before making other preparations.

As you walk through your mission, you will know if you are spiritually dependent on God by the way you live. Spend some time in reflection asking yourself these questions:

1. Is it my first reaction to adversity prayer or my own solution?
2. Do I find myself drifting to prayer throughout the day or only during my scheduled time?
3. Is prayer a time for bearing my soul to God that often leads to a feeling of peacefulness or is it the recitation of a laundry list of items that leaves you feeling dry and unmotivated to pray again.

Pray and Journal:

No matter how you answered the questions above, ask the Lord to refresh and renew your relationship with Him. Pray that God would become your treasure, your rock, and your firm foundation, and that He would do all things in you and through you.

Putting Others First

Day 7

Scripture:

Philippians 2:3-4

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Romans 5:8

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

In 2010 I led a group on a mission trip to Haiti. It was perhaps the hottest weather I had ever been in—and keep in mind that I was living in the desert of southern Arizona at the time! I remember lying in bed counting down the seconds until the oscillating fan swung back around to me. One night when the electricity went out and the fan wouldn't work, I actually got down and laid on the tile floor because that, at least, felt cool.

Driving around Port-au-Prince was not easy either. The roads were bad, and traffic was often heavy, so the going was slow. Additionally, the air conditioning didn't make it to the back seat of the van, so car rides were often unpleasant.

Several days into the trip, I realized that one young man was always sitting in the back seat of the van. I watched to see if this was intentional or was happening by accident, but it was quite clear that he was choosing to sit in the back. Later, when we were alone, I asked him why he was choosing to sit in the back all the time. He explained to me that he knew there were some other team members who couldn't climb to the back very easily and didn't handle the heat as well. He wanted to be sure seats in the front were available for them.

Where did this extraordinary mindset come from? How did this young man develop eyes for others that allowed him to see what others needed and joyfully sacrifice for their sake?

Philippians 2:3-4 holds the key. Verse 3 addresses a very difficult concept—Christian humility. It is easy to misunderstand it in a way that leads to inappropriate self-loathing. However, Christian humility is not about assigning greater worth to someone else, but how you value them. I've heard it said that the Apostle Paul didn't believe we should “think less of ourselves but think of ourselves less.”

Do you value others as important? Do you consider your own interests at the expense of others, or do you consider theirs as well? In fact, to take it one step further, do you take joy in the joy of others? When your child interrupts your entertainment to ask you to read to him or her, do you do so begrudgingly, or do you take joy in the satisfaction of your child? When your sacrifice leads to your discomfort but to the advantage of another, does it bring you joy?

If your answers to the above questions aren't flattering, you're not alone. We are, by nature, self-centered people who feel entitled to what others owe us. It takes a work of God to undo this.

Do you long to walk through life thinking of others instead of focusing on what others owe you? Then meditate on this. When God owed you nothing, he gave you everything.

Pray and Journal:

Take a few moments now to pray that God would equip you with eyes for others and a heart that authentically delights in the satisfaction of others.

Renewing Your Mind

Day 8

Scripture:

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

2 Corinthians 5:17

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

Butterflies are amazing to me. Think about it . . . a creepy, crawly, gross worm with legs crawls up in a sleeping bag and emerges as a beautiful, colorful, flapping butterfly. It's been transformed literally from one creature to another! Before the cocoon, it's a caterpillar; afterwards, it's a butterfly. It's not just a change by degree; it's a whole change in category.

Scripture describes our salvation in a similar way. We are one person before placing our faith in Jesus Christ, and afterwards we are a new creation. We haven't just improved on ourselves; we have become a whole new self!

But now imagine with me that this beautiful butterfly comes out of the cocoon and, instead of flying away, slowly creeps and crawls its way back down the branch to the trunk and slowly down to the ground. Rather than flapping its wings and flying through the air to take in the sights of the world below, it shudders at the height of the grass and the distance to the next place of safety. It still thinks it's a caterpillar!

This is the condition that Romans 12:1-2 addresses. Even though we've been transformed into new creatures with a new purpose, we abandon our new identity and conform to our old ways. God's power hasn't failed. You don't need to re-crucify Christ in your life; you simply need to renew your mind.

There are a couple of old sayings you've probably heard: "garbage in, garbage out" and "open minds are good, so is an open window, but we still put a screen on to keep the bugs out!"

If you want to renew your mind, consider what is going into it. Your mind will naturally conform to whatever is going in. While God has not called us to withdraw from this world, we are called to guard our hearts and minds taking even every thought into account. While there is nothing wrong with secular music or many TV shows and movies, consider going on a spiritual fast of sorts. For a time, consider limiting the messages you take in through a variety of mediums to biblical, mind-renewing messages.

However, we don't just want to limit bad messages entering our mind; we want to replace them with God-honoring messages. This devotion is one way of renewing your mind, but it isn't enough. Reading a few verses, a short devotional, and praying for a few minutes won't offset the garbage that is constantly bombarding us. Consider how you can take "mini retreats" throughout your day when you can meet with God and renew your mind.

Pray and Journal:

Take a few minutes now to ask God to reveal where you are conforming to this world and ask Him to renew your mind. Reflect and make a plan for how and when you can withdraw and meet with God throughout the day.

Having a Kingdom Perspective

Day 9

Scripture:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Romans 8:28

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who[i] have been called according to his purpose.

Corrie Ten Boom grew up in the Netherlands during the Nazi regime. Her family was devoutly Christian and viewed it as their mission to hide Jews from the Nazis. Eventually, her entire family was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned. Shortly after the death of her sister, Corrie was mysteriously released from the prison camp.

One would think that this experience would cause Corrie to question God. Why would he repay her family's devotion with death in prison camps? Instead, she spent the rest of her life preaching God's grace and forgiveness—even for those who murdered millions including her family members. Later in life, she wrote this poem:

The Tapestry

My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colors
He weaveth steadily.

Oft' times He weaveth sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I the underside.

Not 'til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas
And reveal the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.

He knows, He loves, He cares;
Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives the very best to those
Who leave the choice to Him.

During your mission trip, and even more so during your life, there will be trials and tribulations. You will be tempted to question God and wonder where He is. In that moment, you can know precisely where God is—in heaven working all things together for your good (Rom 8:28) and uniquely with you as the Holy Spirit.

You can persevere knowing that your God is in heaven weaving a beautiful tapestry. You can take comfort in knowing that His Spirit lives within you. Anchor yourself to God who will not let you slip and run your race knowing that an eternal glory—that far outweighs any adversity—awaits you in heaven.

Pray and Journal:

Spend some time reflecting on the glory of God and the splendor of heaven. Ask God to bring verses of promise to your mind and heart that will focus you on the unseen eternal in time of tribulation. Write them down and commit them to memory. Close your time in prayer committing yourself to whatever God might have in store for you and asking for a kingdom perspective that accepts the answer “my grace is sufficient for you.”

Above Reproach

Day 10

Scripture:

Philippians 3:12-14

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 10:23

23 “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive.

Romans 7 & 1 Corinthians 9

Some years ago, I participated in a training put on by my bosses for mission team mobilizers in the area. Since I worked for the organization, I knew the expectations, and I knew that they would be watching our reactions throughout.

One morning we were woken up earlier than expected and given an assignment. Once completed, we convened for breakfast, which was small pastries and black coffee. I'm not a coffee drinker and cringed at the idea of a cup of black coffee, but we had talked about hospitality and being gracious receivers and the importance of trying everything you're served. Thinking I was being clever, I quickly poured my coffee into a coffee lover's cup while no one was looking.

After this simulation of a breakfast while on a mission trip, we debriefed the experience and examined our actions in light of what we had been taught. My boss must have seen me pour my coffee out since he asked specifically who had done that.

At the end of our debriefing time, my boss talked about being above reproach. As leaders, he said, we are the ones who set the example to be followed. By nature, people will usually reject a message if they don't see it lived out in the messenger. By side-stepping a standard we had set, I was undermining the message and even giving permission for others to disregard it.

If you've been around a church for a very long time, you've heard it said that we should be above reproach, but what does this actually mean? To be above reproach means to be without criticism. Paul commands that elders of the church be above reproach, but doesn't this contradict the fact that all of us still sin (even Paul—see Romans 7) and perhaps even contradict mercy, grace, and forgiveness? And wouldn't this apply only to elders and not to me?

Paul doesn't instruct us to strive for perfection for perfection's sake, but to seek after that for which Christ called us heavenward—a life consistent with the gospel. We are to live in a way that does not inhibit the gospel through criticism but puts the gospel on display to those around us.

Living above reproach is not easy. You will do things you don't want to do. The devil may even try to use your freedom in Christ as justification to not do what you ought to do. You are free to wear shorts when it's hot, eat “unclean” food, listen to secular music, drink alcohol, take a walk with someone of the opposite gender, and pierce whatever part of your body you want, among many other things.

However, doing these things might not always be best for the gospel (1 Cor. 10:23). If you are going to live above reproach, you will need a singular, focused, burning passion for God's glory—a passion that overcomes your desire for the temporary pleasure of sin and even for the rights and privileges of your salvation (1 Cor. 9).

Pray and Journal:

Take some time in prayer and meditation to consider what you are willing to give up for God to be glorified. Ask God to not just change your behavior, but to change your heart.

Nurture Knowledge

Day 11

Scripture:

2 Peter 3:18

18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

From 2010-2013, I led a number of mission trips to Haiti as part of a partnership with several churches ministering to their communities after the earthquake in Port-au-Prince. Interestingly, Haiti has two official languages. The first official language is French—a residual effect of their colonial period. The second is called Haitian Creole, their own native language, which is a mix of African languages that came over with the slave trade and French.

Haitian Creole is the heart language for most Haitians, is most often used in homes, and is most universally known. French is the language of education. Prior to 1987, French was the only recognized national language, which meant all government services were conducted in French. If you couldn't speak French, you couldn't participate. Language was a way to separate the “haves” from the “have-nots” and those who only spoke Haitian Creole were degraded.

Like most people, whenever I travel, I want to be able to talk to people and learn about them. One of the best ways to break the ice is to ask people to teach me their language. One time, we were talking to a couple of teenagers and asking them how to say certain words and phrases in Haitian Creole. The first few times, they would tell us the French word, but we would push to hear the word in Creole.

Finally, the teenagers asked why we wanted to learn Creole instead of French. Everything about them expressed that they didn't view Creole as worthy of learning. We told them we loved the Haitian people, and we realized if we really wanted to talk to them, we needed to know Creole not French. Upon hearing this, their countenance changed from insecurity and embarrassment to self-worth. I believe they felt valued and loved in a God-honoring way they had not often experienced.

We often encourage people to enter new cultures as a learner and a servant rather than coming as the expert with a message to “save them.” This is the best way to build relationships, maintain a positive testimony, and communicate the gospel in a clear and accurate way.

Our posture as a learner and servant isn't exclusively for our approach to those of a new culture. This should also be our posture with the Lord. As we put into practice this posture with the Lord, we will find it natural to approach others the same way.

Remember, you are not the expert, nor the savior on your mission. If you are going to have anything to offer others on your mission trip and in your home life, you must grow in the Lord. You must have an open channel with God where He can speak and work in and through you to those around you.

Pray and Journal:

Prayerfully consider what you need to learn from the Lord before, during, and after your trip. Pray and ask God to help you approach others as a learner and servant so you can accurately communicate the gospel in word and deed to those who don't know Christ.

Team Unity

Day 12

Scripture:

John 13:34-35

34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Colossians 3:12-14

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Recently, I was talking with a friend, Tim, about influential people in our lives and in our faith journey. Interestingly, he hadn't seen or talked to the person most influential in his life during the ten years previous to his decision to follow Jesus. I asked him how that worked, and he told me an interesting story.

One of Tim's good friends in high school, Jeff, was a Christian. Tim often ate dinner with Jeff's family. Dinner at Jeff's house was different. Jeff's sister and parents always sat down and ate together, and dinner was hardly boring. Tim sometimes wondered when any of them ate, as it seemed like they were always talking. Even though Tim wasn't part of the family and didn't share their faith, he could see that they had something special—something different.

Tim and Jeff eventually went to different colleges and lost touch. Tim's life was plugging along pretty normally when his mother died. He was an only child and didn't know his father, so suddenly life felt lonely. In his darkest moment, he remembered the family dinners with Jeff, and their Christian faith, and decided maybe God was what he was missing. From there, he found a church and met Jesus.

As Tim told me the story, I couldn't help but think of John 13:34-35 and the fact that the calling card of Christianity ought to be how we love one another. Jeff's family lived out these verses, and it produced fruit in Tim's life. You will have similar opportunities on your trip, and in life, to display Christ's love as you live on mission with Him.

However, loving one another is not an easy command, especially on a mission trip. You'll likely be eating, sleeping, and working with the same people. These close quarters provide opportunities to hurt one another. Division and rejection can cause people to think, "If that's how they treat each other, why would I want to be like them?" This is where Colossians 3:12-14 applies.

To love one another doesn't mean we never hurt each other. In fact, Colossians 3:13 suggests just the opposite. However, if we clothe ourselves with the qualities listed in verse 12, ask for and give forgiveness when we hurt each other, and make love the motivating factor of all of it, then we will put Christ's love on display for all to see and experience.

Do not underestimate the significance of your relationships, be it with team members, family members, friends, and co-workers. Jesus says we'll be known by our love. How are you known? Are your relationships constantly fractured, or are they mutually encouraging and peaceful? Do people spend time around you and feel like they've experienced God's love?

Pray and Journal:

Are you compassionate? Kind? Humble? Gentle? Patient? Do you forgive as the Lord forgave you? Do you love others? If not, ask God to remove your pride and change your heart and attitude.

Scripture:

Jeremiah 18:1-6

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 2 “Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will give you my message.” 3 So I went down to the potter’s house, and I saw him working at the wheel. 4 But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.

5 Then the word of the Lord came to me. 6 He said, “Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?” declares the Lord. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel.

Isaiah 64:8

Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

I have five kids, and I love them very much, but I can’t wait for them to be done with Play-Doh! It’s a great toy that can be shaped and re-shaped and keeps the kids off electronics, but it can become such a mess when they don’t take care of it.

I imagine you’ve noticed that as long as Play-Doh is kept in the can, it is flexible and moldable. You can make it into shapes, you can mix it with other colors, and you can even pull it apart and put it back together again. It’s generally soft and squishy and very moldable.

However, if you leave Play-Doh out, like my kids often do, it becomes hard and brittle. Instead of breaking down to be remolded into something else, it just breaks—then crumbles into tiny pieces all over the table, the chair, and the carpet!

Today’s verses use the analogy of the potter and the clay to illustrate the relationship between God and us. The idea is that God is making you into something. He uses circumstances, people, His Word, and the Holy Spirit, among other things, to shape us. If we are flexible, the molding process can happen very quickly and easily. However, if we are rigid, stubborn, and prideful, the Potter must break us down and reshape us.

We often use the phrase when preparing mission teams, “God loves to mold you, but He’ll chisel if He must.” Your mission trip will require you to be flexible. You will have a set of plans, a schedule, and expectations, and those will likely be challenged before you even set foot off the plane. You might not have access to something you thought you would. Perhaps the number of people participating in a ministry activity will be significantly more or less than you anticipated. Or you might even be sick and unable to participate as you planned.

You have a choice to make. Will you shine as you adapt and are molded by God, or will you whine because things haven’t gone your way? You don’t have to be Billy Graham, Mother Teresa, or any other spiritual giant to shine not whine. You only need to have a Kingdom perspective, renew your mind, humble yourself, seek God’s glory above your own pleasure . . . sound familiar?

If you’ve been journaling your thoughts and prayers along the way, go back and review what you wrote. In doing so, you will be softening your heart and renewing your mind, so it is flexible and ready to be molded by God in whatever comes your way. You’ll be free to put others first, love your neighbor as yourself, and preach the gospel both in word and deed.

Pray and Journal:

Close this time by submitting yourself to God in prayer. Ask Him to mold you and shape you. Pray that God would give you grace when you’re being molded through difficult times and wisdom to see how He is working.

Go and Tell!

Day 14

Scripture:

Matthew 10:7-8

7 As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

Matthew 28:18-20

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

My Grandma Ruark was known for three things amongst her dozens of grandchildren—her love for the ocean, Scrabble, and keeping her diary. My grandfather died before I was born, so it was just my grandmother who would come and visit every summer. She loved the ocean, so we would go down to the Sea Gypsy Motel in Lincoln City, Oregon every year. Most of the time, when I woke up, my grandmother would already have been out for a walk on the beach.

If we were lucky, we'd get a room with a sliding glass door that opened right out onto the beach, or you could sit at the table and play Scrabble for hours with Grandma while watching the waves roll in. If you were quiet enough, you could even hear the waves in the background.

One year, when I was 11 years old, instead of her coming to Oregon, we went to Pennsylvania for a family reunion. We all stayed on the same grounds with each family having a small apartment (my dad was one of nine children, so this was no small family gathering!).

One night during the trip, I was over at Grandma's playing Scrabble, and I finally won! We played many games over the years, and I never won! I was so excited I couldn't wait to tell them, so I ran 150 yards back to our apartment to tell my parents. I even called Grandma back to ask her to write about it in her diary! I had the most amazing news in the world, and I was excited to tell everyone!

When was the last time you had this kind of unashamed enthusiasm to tell good news? When was the last time your good news wasn't just about you, but something that would benefit the listener? As Christians, we have the best news ever! We can be healed and redeemed and live forever with God!

Today's passages are a reminder you are being sent out by and with the authority of Jesus Christ! Furthermore, you don't go alone but with Jesus! This means you can go boldly and without fear. Remember that there are many ways to share the good news of the gospel. It can be as direct as declaring the message of the gospel with your mouth, as tangible as healing a sickness in Jesus's name (either through prayer or through loving care), as miraculous as setting someone free from a demon, and as illustrative as a baptism. Do you believe the gospel is worth telling? Is it such good news that it's worth risking embarrassment, rejection, or even your popularity?

Pray and Journal:

Spend some time thinking about where you would be had you not placed your faith in Jesus. Now pray and ask God for:

1. Opportunities to share the gospel
2. The ability to share boldly and clearly
3. People to respond positively to the Holy Spirit.