

# The Spiritual Side of Mission Work Grouping

## A Resource for Mission Team Leaders

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Work grouping offers numerous possibilities for spiritual growth both individually and as a group. Offering time alone each morning, whether 10 or 30 minutes, is a real gift to your team. It allows quiet time to read scripture, pray, reflect on what God is doing in their lives on the trip and can be a very special time. It can also help individuals develop patterns and disciplines for their lives that will be a blessing, not only on the trip, but after they return home.

Here are some specific ways in which you may want to help your team members individually and corporately nurture their faith:

- **Journaling** can be very helpful. As people write down their feelings about a day, and what they have seen, heard and experienced, it helps them process it and gives some specifics to pray about.
- **Daily reflection questions** – both for journaling and for group reflection – prod group members in a thoughtful direction and help them share what they did, what they are thinking and feeling, and where they see God at work.
- **A community journal** is also a possibility with someone collecting written reflections, keeping notes about group discussions and writing down stories people want to remember about their experience. This can help rekindle the experience once everyone is back home and the group is sharing with others and the congregation.

As the leader, you set the schedule. Allowing time for being alone, for writing in journals and for group reflection time and worship maximizes the work group experience for everyone. Set expectations and let everyone know it is going to be an intentionally spiritual experience as well as a team building experience.

The following are a sample of questions for reflecting on experiences. You may pick and choose from them or, better still, let them be a guide to developing your own agenda based on your specific group.

## Personal Reflection Questions

1. As I review everything that happened today, these are my thoughts and feelings about what I did and where I saw God at work.
2. In whom did I see Christ today? How was that manifest?
3. As I reflect on my work here, these are my thoughts and feelings about what I have received from this experience and how I have been changed.
4. What have I learned on this trip? What will I take into the future to enlighten my life and faith?
5. What did I learn about the depth of the human spirit, the pain and suffering beyond what I imagined, the hope in the midst of darkness, lightening others loads, the gifts of love and grace that help us survive and even thrive?
6. What did I learn about myself? Did I overcome moments of fear, loneliness or weakness? Did I let myself down when I was annoyed, or tired or angry? Or did I remember I am human?
7. This week has been a complex experience. How did it challenge you? What did you see in yourself that you would like to develop or change? Where was God? Maybe the gift of my experience is to learn to live in the midst of the mystery of God.

## Group Sharing Questions

1. What are your expectations for the week?
2. What are your fears?
3. What can the group pray about for you today?
4. How goes it with your soul?
5. What were your impressions upon getting to the work site? Reactions to the work you face?
6. How well is our group connecting with one another?
7. To what do you turn when you seek comfort? What comforts do you miss? What are you glad to take a break from?
8. In what new ways are group members working together? What are you learning about each other? How do group members' expectations differ about how to get things done?
9. How is the work going? How well are you working with others? How can we help each other when we get tired or discouraged?
10. When did you see the face of Jesus today on other workers? Those you were helping?
11. How has God given you what you needed to keep working this week?
12. Why are you here?
  - What do you think God will have to teach you on this trip?
  - Are you looking for some renewal?
  - Do you want to give back some of what He has given you?
13. How do you feel about leaving? What is easy to leave? What is difficult?
14. How did your fears get overcome?
15. How did the week stack up to your expectations?

## Bible Study Ideas

### Be Joyful (Romans 15:13)

At every moment of our life, we have the opportunity to choose joy, based on the knowledge that we belong to God, that we are unconditionally loved and nothing can take God away from us. It's more about the way we respond to any circumstance of life than the circumstances itself. The choice can be resentment or gratitude.

- Are you a joyful person?
- What specific things can you do to develop your capacity to choose joy?
- What preoccupations or worries are keeping you from being joyful?
- Share something from today that brought you joy.

### Celebrate (Psalm 118:24-25)

There are days, maybe today is one, when the last thing you want to do is rejoice. We have worked hard all day, will be sore because we used muscles we haven't in a long time, are tired tonight and may be feeling some satisfaction, a sense of being overwhelmed or some frustration. Let's be honest with each other and say how we feel. Let's be honest with God too and let God give us a reason to rejoice. God has given us this day to live and to serve – be glad!

- What can you rejoice about today?

## Control (Philippians 3:13-14)

Many times we get so comfortable in our routine, confident even, that we become self-reliant instead of God-reliant. When we get out of our comfort zones and familiar surroundings, we may rely more on God. Then God is able to mold us and form us into new beings. This is a process that takes perseverance and faithfulness in following and trusting God to provide.

- What areas of your life can you identify in which you have difficulty giving control to God?
- Have you ever trusted God with a difficult situation and watched God work over time?

Just as our work is building on the work of another team before us, God often grows us one day at a time. Share an experience in which he has done this in you.

## Humility (John 13:14-17)

We are servants in this place. But what do we know about genuine servanthood? Servants sacrifice and give without regard for status, rewards or thanks. It's not easy. We may have to swallow our pride when asked to do unpleasant things that make us physically or emotionally uncomfortable. Sometimes we may feel like we are not needed or valued and we have to bend in order to follow someone else. It's not easy but it is the way of Jesus. Often he reminded people by his actions that he came to serve all people without the promise of reward or higher status. He showed us what God was trying to tell us from the start that all humanity is beloved by God and we are intended to serve one another.

Recall some instances where Jesus served by putting others first.

- How has pride been a barrier in your relationships with people or with God at any point in your life?
- How can you serve in your church community?
- How can we convey humility as we share our stories from this trip with our friends and family?

## Living in the Present (Revelation 21:3-5)

Learn to live each day, hour and minute as a new beginning, unique opportunity to make everything new. It is hard to live in the present. The past and future keep harassing us. The past has guilt. The future has worries. We feel regretful, angry, confused or at least hesitant about so much in our lives. And these feelings are often colored by guilt that says, "You ought to have..." These "oughts" keep us from being fully present to the moment now. Worse than the guilt may be the worries and the "what ifs". The real enemies of our life are the "oughts" and the "ifs". Real life takes place in the now. God is a God of the present and is always in the moment, whether it is easy, hard, sorrowful or painful. Jesus came to wipe away the burden of the past and the worries of the future and help us discover God right where we are, here and now.

- Do you find it hard to live in the present? Why or why not?
- Are you excited to start each day fresh and new or do you tend to feel like it is the 'same stuff, different day'?
- What can you do to change your thinking if you wake up on the wrong side of the bed every day?
- What keeps you from celebrating today?
- How can we remain focused on the present?

## More Bible Study Options

For each of the passages below, the group can ask these questions:

- What does this passage mean to you?
- How is it relevant in the specific context of our mission team experience?
- How would our behaviour be different if we took this passage seriously?
- How would it affect our behaviour after we return home?

### **The Word of God**

John 8:31-32

Hebrews 4:12

II Timothy 3:16-17

### **Dealing with Temptation**

I Peter 5:8-9

Ephesians 6:10-18

James 1:13-15

### **The Role, Responsibility, and Power of the Body of Christ**

I Corinthians 12:12-26

I Corinthians 13:1-3

Ephesians 2:10

Ephesians 4:1-16

I Peter 4:10

Galatians 5:19-26

Galatians 6:9-10

Micah 6:6-8

Matthew 5:14

II Thessalonians 3:13

I Timothy 4:12-13

I Timothy 6:3-10

John 13:1-17

## **Closure Opportunities**

- Have an affirmation circle the last night of your trip. Each person, in turn, listens as the others in the circle share what they see as that person's spiritual gift or positive qualities. This is a powerful closing event. Lift these gifts to God as a thank offering.
- Another important closure opportunity involves reflecting on the experience with those that you have served in the course of your visit. This can be done in a number of ways. One option is to have a set plan for the experience, either at some point about halfway and then again at the end of the trip, or perhaps simply at the end. This is a chance to talk through your experiences with those who have been with you. This can be particularly important if you work beside people at the site.

Questions to ask in such a setting of both the local leaders and the group are:

- Where did you see God at work this week?
- What surprised you about one another?
- What did you learn this week?

It is often important to remember that you are teaching and learning at the same time, just as those who are hosting you.

## **Coming Down from the Mountain**

Going home has the potential to be either a "downer" or an exciting time. It is important that you prepare as a group for going home, sharing your experiences, continuing to process those individual growth experiences, and preventing this trip from becoming just another mission experience where God was close at hand until you returned home.

Groups can often feel that God is closer when they are away than when they are at home. It is important to stress that perhaps the reality is that we are more open to the working of God when we are away from home.

Encourage your group to continue in the habits they have had while on the trip. Journaling, a regular prayer and devotional time, and authentic sharing with Christian brothers and sisters are excellent habits to maintain.

In addition, structure future opportunities to share the experience with others and to gather back together as a group. Some ideas for this include:

- **A picture-sharing night.** Have a potluck or a snack night and share pictures with one another from the experience. As you walk down memory lane together, you have the opportunity to reflect further on how the experience affected you.
- **Accountability partners** can be important if members of your group are seeking support in continuing a deeper spiritual journey. You do not need to do it all. Encourage team members to create groups of two or three when they get home as a way to continue to challenge and support one another.
- **Maintain a connection to the site where you worked.** Maintain contact with the leaders from the site. If you receive regular updates, you will begin to feel connected and in relationship with those you served. This can also help people to keep that connection to what God was doing in their lives when on the trip.
- **Share your experience.** A time of sharing the experience with the congregation after your return is very important to the congregation's spiritual growth. It also brings more people on board for the future growth of the ministry. Ask for time during worship to share a bit of your experience and how God was present in the experience. Host a church potluck and have tables of pictures and members of the group ready to share their experience. Ask for a time during a Sunday School class to share on a more intimate level.