



Tim Dearborn

# Short-Term Missions+ Workbook

Revised and Expanded

**From Mission Tourists  
to Global Citizens**

A 10-week course for groups and individuals

Taken from *Short-Term Missions Workbook (Revised and Expanded Edition)*  
by Tim Dearborn.  
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# The God of Mission

# 1

**You are about to enter into** a great, wonderful adventure. Most likely you will discover more about God, yourself, God's people, and your place in God's mission. What a privilege! Your experience will be enhanced by reminding yourself that this is God's world. We need not approach it with our guard up, for Jesus is Lord and all authority in heaven and earth is given to him. Through the incarnation, God embraced this world in all its sinfulness and corruption. As the body of Christ, empowered by the Spirit, we are free to extend that embrace to others.

The way we view the world often determines the quality of our involvement in it. Do we think of the world as a hostile, threatening, and alien place, perhaps a place from which we must be protected? Or is the world our home, a safe and friendly place, encompassed by the reign of God?

In this chapter we will examine our attitude toward the world, our understanding of God's involvement in it, and our place as participants in God's mission.

## Suggested Group Activities

- Begin the process of getting to know one another by discussing the following questions in pairs: Where have you traveled in the past (for work, vacation, or mission)? What are you most excited about for your trip? Then introduce each other to the group.
- In groups of four, discuss the following questions, and then pray together: What are you feeling fearful about? Why do you believe God is calling you to go on this trip?
- Play the "Insiders-Outsiders" simulation game (thirty minutes; see the leader's guide for this chapter in appendix one).

## It's God's World and God's Mission

In the midst of a world and a church that are shaken by crises and controversies, the gospel proclaims that "we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (Hebrews 12:28) and a hope that is "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul . . . that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered" (Hebrews 6:19-20).

To engage in mission is to participate in the coming of the kingdom of God.

## SECTION ONE

- We are to seek first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33).
- We are to hunger for the justice of the kingdom (Matthew 5:6).
- The desire for the kingdom to come should be foremost among our prayerful petitions (Matthew 6:10).
- Jesus' first sermon was about the kingdom at hand (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:18).
- Jesus said that the purpose of his teaching was the proclamation of the mystery of the kingdom (Luke 8:10).
- History will not end until the kingdom has been preached to all ethnic groups in the world (Matthew 24:14).
- Jesus' final instruction on earth concerned the kingdom (Acts 1:1-8). Following his resurrection and prior to his ascension, the Lord devoted his last opportunity for face-to-face teaching to the kingdom.

■ **Questions for REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION** ■

**READ MATTHEW 6:33.**

| How would you define the kingdom of God?

| What does it mean to seek it?

| What is your response to Jesus' statements?

| What are some of its implications for your short-term mission service?

In God's kingdom, God is the Lord of the whole world and our whole lives. God calls all people to full-time service. Our short-term mission trip is simply part of our lifelong citizenship in God's kingdom. When we enter the world we are not entering alien territory. We may find foes and fiends, but Christ is their only true Lord. "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them" (Colossians 2:15). When we participate in God's mission, we are part of a victory procession. We move out to celebrate Christ's reign as king of creation. There is nothing pathetic or besieged about the church in mission. She knows who is Lord and who has won the triumph. Our engagement in mission isn't our strenuous effort to try to serve God. Rather, it is our participation by the Spirit in the mighty acts of God.

Because God is Lord of our whole lives, we cannot follow Jesus simply by adding allegiance to him on top of other commitments. Everything is transformed by faith in Christ: finances and family, ambition and attitudes, priorities and politics. As followers of Christ

- we renounce all other loyalties;
- we worship God with our bodies; and
- we have no life apart from the life of God.

Faith in Christ is not merely a way of getting away from the problems of life or finding peace and strength in their midst. Rather, living in Christ radically changes life. As the following Scripture passages indicate, Jesus is very precise about where we are to serve.

### Questions for REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

#### READ ACTS 1:1-10.

What are the four spheres of witness that Jesus describes, and what characterizes each one?

What are the equivalents of each of these four spheres for you?

The church does not have a mission for God in the world. The God of mission has the church in the world!

**BEYOND DUTY**

| In which sphere is it easiest/hardest for you to live as a witness?

| What does Jesus say is needed before we can be witnesses?

| In what ways would you like to more fully receive the power of the Spirit to strengthen your life as a witness?

Sadly, the church has often interpreted this command as something to be completed sequentially. First we take care of our needs at home, then we move out toward the ends of the earth. Other churches have responded to the call to the farthest corners of the world and skipped over their Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. But we are called and empowered by the Spirit to be witnesses in our community (Jerusalem), our country (Judea), among people of differing cultural backgrounds who live around us (Samaria), and to the ends of the earth—simultaneously, not sequentially!

## SECTION TWO

### Learning—The World Is Our Classroom

One reason why the body of Christ invests in short-term mission is that it is an exceptional discipleship and mission-education experience—further equipping us for a lifetime of service in God’s kingdom. God is about to send you into a remarkable classroom (the world) with remarkable teachers (people and the Holy Spirit). A good short-term mission experience will lead people to reflect on several sets of pivotal and challenging questions. These Eight Great Questions will be explored more fully in the final chapter, but it’s helpful to begin thinking about them now.

***What can I learn about myself?*** You will have abundant opportunities to see yourself in new ways. Seek to be open as a learner—even about yourself.

***What can I learn about God?*** Our faith is expanded when we can see it through the eyes of people from a different background. Seek to understand why others believe as they do.

***What can I learn about the people of God, the church, and community?*** While on a short-term mission trip, we often discover that other Christians' forms of community worship and church life are different from our own. Seek to understand what contributes to a vibrant Christian community.

***What can I learn about how culture affects the way we live and understand the gospel?*** Our perceptions are conditioned by our culture and background. That is an inescapable part of life. However, entering into another culture can give us perspective on our own culture and possibly overcome some of the limitations of our understanding. Seek to gain new insights into the gospel that emerge from a different culture.

***What can I learn about justice, economics, poverty, and politics?*** Serving in the developing world or in America's inner cities often leads us to encounter poverty, economic disparity, injustice, and structural evil—as well as great kindness, courage, creativity, and compassion. Why do injustices exist, what is God doing in response, and to what form of engagement is God calling the church? Seek to explore these tough and urgent issues. Why are some poor and others rich? What does God say about this?

***What can I learn about discipleship?*** When we engage in short-term mission, we often have the privilege of encountering people with a radical dedication to Jesus Christ. We go seeking to grow in our faith; we also go seeking to share it. We often end up receiving far more than we expected. Seek to gain one new insight into what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Seek to have one new step of faithfulness permanently incorporated into your life.

***What can I learn about a globally appropriate lifestyle?*** In light of what we learn about poverty and international economics, what are some implications not just for society in general but also for our own lifestyles as Christians? Seek to discern one way you can live differently in response to the needs of others around the world.

***What can I learn about my own vocation?*** Finally, what is God seeking to say to you about your own life and work? What insight do you gain into your calling and God's will for your life? For those who are students, what questions do you want to pursue more fully in your courses and degree programs in light of what you've learned and seen? Seek to understand ways you can steward the gifts, talents, and time with which God has entrusted you in order to participate more fully in God's purposes in the world.

### Questions for REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Evaluate each question in the following way using table 1.1. Note first the questions that surprised you—in other words, the ones you didn't anticipate dealing with on the trip (mark **!**). Did you find any threatening (mark **X**)? Finally, which questions most intrigued you, and which did you find yourself eager to pursue (mark **?**)?

**Table 1.1**

1. What can I learn about myself?	
2. What can I learn about God?	
3. What can I learn about community and the church?	
4. What can I learn about culture and its impact on faith?	
5. What can I learn about justice and poverty?	
6. What can I learn about discipleship?	
7. What can I learn about my lifestyle?	
8. What can I learn about my vocation?	

## SECTION THREE

### Serving—Go on a Treasure Hunt

I believe the fundamental ministry we can exercise as short-term visitors and servants in another culture is the ministry of affirmation. God is inviting us on a treasure hunt. Our privilege is to be so led by the Spirit of God that we can find treasures in this new context that had been hidden from our eyes previously. Not only were they hidden from us because we've never been there before, but they may even have been hidden from the eyes of the people who live there.

Thus, God invites us to lift up before others' eyes the ways God is at work among and through them, as well as the strengths and gifts they are bringing to their own community. We don't go primarily to bring treasures (though of course we hope to bring some skills, insights, and even material resources that people are seeking). Nor do we go to take resources home (though we're likely to return with bags full of items that will help us and others remember our trip). Rather, we are invited to discover treasures that are present among the people with whom we serve, and together with them, we praise God for God's great kindness.



**Questions for REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION****READ 1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5.**

| What did Paul seek to discover among the people he worked with?

| What do you think this would mean in your situation?

| What might it look like?

| What was Paul's appraisal of his own abilities and attitudes in this ministry?

| How does this relate to you and your attitudes?

| What will it mean, in tangible ways, for you to rely on the Spirit?

Here are some ways we can engage in this treasure hunt.

- *Walk with humility.* Remember, you are showing up late to a meeting. God has been at work among these people long before you arrived!
- *Embrace with affirmation.* Your greatest gift to the people you meet will be affirmation, not criticism.
- *Live with vulnerability.* Don't be afraid of weakness—it's normal.
- *Practice flexibility.* Always expect the unexpected—you're not in control.
- *Live as a student.* Be determined to learn from everyone.
- *Work as a servant.* Be willing to do whatever needs to be done.
- *Speak as a storyteller.* Let the Spirit tell God's story through you.

## SECTION FOUR

### Transforming—Know How to Return Home by a Different Route

I've come to believe that the most important aspect of short-term mission service is preparation, the second most important aspect is integration of the experience into the lives of participants once they return home, and the third most important aspect is the trip itself. We can be confident that God is going to do wonderful things through you while on this trip. Otherwise you wouldn't go, and the body of Christ probably wouldn't invest time and money in your service. However, the long-term impact of your service on others will be deeply affected by the quality of your preparation, and the long-term impact on your own life will be deeply affected by the quality of your debriefing and integration.

Therefore, one gift you can give yourself is to begin preparing now for your return home. Here are some suggestions.

Reflect on the Eight Great Questions. What might God want you to learn through this short-term mission trip? Keep the questions in mind throughout your trip, and refer to them occasionally. Find a prayer and debriefing partner who agrees to pray daily for you while you are gone and who is willing to meet with you several times after you return. Seek someone you trust, and give them permission to ask you any question they want. Make commitments before you leave regarding when you will meet.

Pray now for two new relationships God will give you—one with someone on your team and one with a new person you will meet. Commit yourself now to pray for and keep in touch with those two people after you return.

Keep reflecting on the question, How is God calling me to live differently once I'm home in light of what I experienced on this trip?

**Question for REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

What's your response to this statement by P. T. Forsyth: "The weakness of much current mission work and much current preaching is that they betray the sense that what is yet to be done is greater than what has already been done"?<sup>1</sup>

**Suggested Reading and Learning Exercises**

- Read *Beyond Duty*, the introduction and chapters one and two.
- Invite someone to be your prayer and debriefing partner (someone who isn't going on your trip that you respect and trust, who preferably has already been involved in crosscultural mission service). Meet together and discuss your initial reactions to the Eight Great Questions.

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