

A person wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt and black pants is riding a black bicycle on a dirt path. The background is a dry, brushy landscape with tall grass and some green shrubs under a clear sky. The person is leaning forward, and the bicycle has a black frame with 'COLUMBI' visible on the down tube. The text 'How to Make Your Short-Term Missions Trip More Meaningful' is overlaid in the top left corner in a white box.

How to Make Your Short-Term Missions Trip More *Meaningful*

INTRODUCTION

Regardless of what you think about Short-Term Missions, more people than ever before are talking about whether they are good or bad.

In the church realm, the question of efficacy and purpose has been a question that churches and missions organizations have been wrestling with for the better part of a decade. Yet, short-term missions trips are the most widely participated in type of missions trip, with many churches still hosting them on a regular basis.

Should they be used as a discipleship tool? Are these required for global relationships? Is the impact worth the investment?

Success in missions happens when it leads to *more missions.*

Ultimately, short-term trips are happening and they can be helpful. However, debrief is the most important factor in making short-term trips impactful, yet it is also the most neglected.

Success in missions only happens when it leads to more missions: more praying, more giving, more going, more sending, more learning.

Debrief is how participants move from a mentality of “mission accomplished” to “mission is life.”



PROBLEM

The dilemma of short-term trips is complicated, in part because the motivations for participating in them in the first place is complicated. Can you relate with these?

- We want our children to know how good they have it and be exposed to poverty.
- I want to use my expertise and help the people we are going to visit start a brand new ministry based on MY expertise.
- I want to go on a missions trip because I love missions.
- We have a great idea for an outreach that our partners will love, and we can't wait to do it for them.

I want to grow in my faith so I want to go on a missions trip.

- I've never been to (insert foreign country) before...
- I want to serve somewhere in the church and this was an option.
- I want to grow in my faith so I want to go on a missions trip.
- I want to connect with our partners receiving financial investments.
- Because our church offers missions trips.
- Because I went last year and I want to see my friends again.

Some of these motivations are outright harmful, some can be good. The “best” motivation for participating in a short-term trip is open to interpretation and will vary with each participant and trip.

Great motivations for missions do exist. Here are some of our favorites from over the years:

- I want to learn from the global Church how to better care for my community.
- I believe God wants to teach me something on this trip, so I feel like I am going with a posture of obedience and open-handedness.
- I just don't want to miss what God is doing around the world.
- I am treating this short-term trip like a vision trip to better understand how God wants to use me on this earth.
- I've heard stories how missions trips have transformed some of my friends and I too want to taste and see.
- I want to serve the missionaries, learn from them, and be a blessing in any way I can.
- I want to increase my perspective of God at work around the world.

**I want to learn from
the *global* Church.**



The Bottom Line

The problem: When short-term trips are more about doing than becoming.

The solution: Transformation, precipitated by an experience, and solidified through belief.

A trip, whether the motivation is good or bad, can be redeemed through debrief (if it's done well/at all).



VISION CAST

What:

The time and expense of a short-term trip is an investment; due care for missional spiritual development should be paramount.

Why:

Short-term missions trips done intentionally can offer a two-fold benefit: 1) Bring vitality and energy by partnering with local ministries and 2) Offer a missional discipleship opportunity to participants, helping them engage with missions that exceeds the initial trip.

Why It's So Important:

A short-term missions trip should never be just about that trip in and of itself; it should serve as a catalyst leading to more missions.

MYTHS & MECHANICS



Myth #1

Short-term trips can't actually be helpful or "relevant." They do more harm than good.



Reality:

Short-term trips can be helpful when they are intentionally led with the long-term field and community in mind. These trips can come alongside the work already being done and offer a manpower "boost" or outside expertise and training. Groups should not come with their own agenda but rather begin partnering with the field months prior to the trip and serving alongside them wherever needed.

Myth #2

Short-term trips are not needed for advancing the Gospel because of technology and global interconnectedness.

Reality:

If the internet and globalization were all it took to reach the world with the Gospel, there would not be 3.4+ billion people who are still unreached in the 35 years since the internet became publicly accessible.

In Scripture, we clearly see that Jesus took at least six cross-cultural short-term trips with his disciples. One example is in John 4 when Jesus stopped in Samaria on his way to Galilee to minister to the woman at the well. Just one conversation along the way changed the life of a woman forever, which led to almost an entire village coming to know him. This is the power of divine appointments built into a short-term trip.



Myth #3

It would be more effective to just send money to local ministries rather than spending money on a trip.

Reality:

This is one of the biggest dilemmas facing short-term trips because in pure physical impact it is often true.

However, because participant discipleship and missional development is one of the goals, short-term trip experiences are invaluable. Sending money does not create a passion in participants that will cause them to be better givers, attenders, promoters, etc. (See the next myth and the reality's statistics.)



Myth #4

Short-term trips don't have a lasting impact on participants.



Reality:

A Barna study on the Future of Missions found that of highly church-engaged older adults, the ones who had gone on a short-term trip gave 400% more money towards missions than those who had never gone on a short-term trip. Money talks: this is not about fundraising, but people seeing the value of missions and being willing to participate.

Additionally, in all of the age groups surveyed, interest in missions overall for the rest of people's lives was increased if they had gone on a short-term trip (see: [Podcast — Gospel Mobilization](#)). Short-term trips are a development tool for participants to catch a glimpse of the many ways they can be involved in missions even if they never serve long-term.

INTEGRATION IDEAS FOR SHORT-TERM TRIP LEADERS



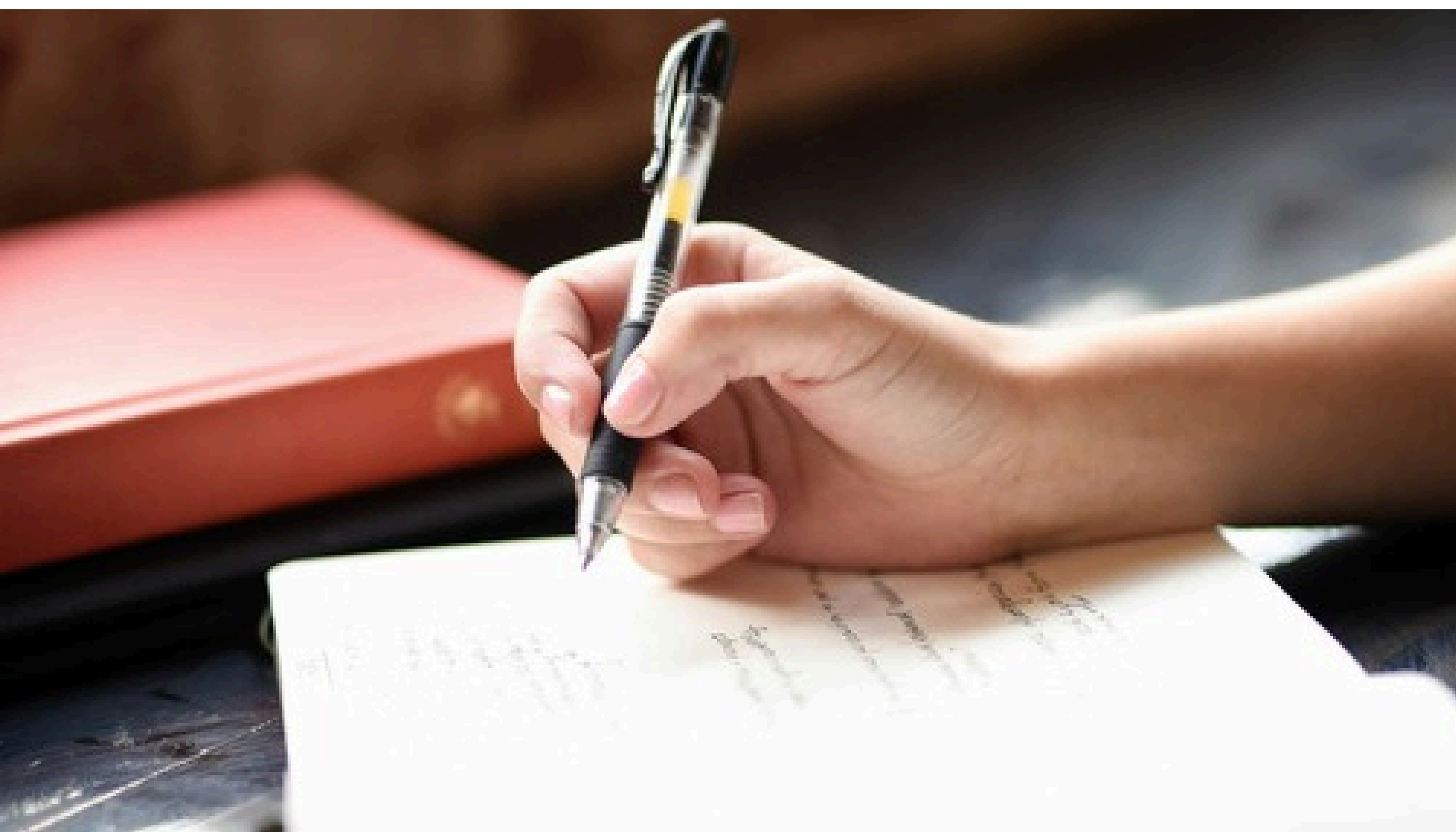
BEFORE TRIP

- Plan short-term trips to visit and support long-term workers your church supports. This provides ongoing relationship and connection. It also allows your short-term trips to adapt and grow with the field's needs as they change because of the long-term connection.
- Help participants learn to listen to God prior to the trip so they are more attuned to listening to him during the trip. Cast a vision for the short-term trip not just being about the time on-site.
- Consider having all participants commit to some “mentality expectations,” for example: to be easy going, focused, present, to ask more questions than give answers. Consider developing this list together as part of a pre-trip meeting.



ON TRIP

- Morning or Evening Debriefs can be helpful.
- Encourage journaling because we often can't process everything in real time as it's happening. Deeper reflection helps you capitalize on the time spent in country by increasing the ability to notice and discern.
- As the leader on the trip, already be thinking about how the things that participants are experiencing will impact them at home. Be prepared to help them debrief critical experiences in the moment and follow up once you've returned.
- Help every participant genuinely ask if they are called to full-time overseas mission or how they are called to give their whole life to God. A short-term trip can be the perfect place to examine these questions outside of one's normal routine and environment.



AFTER TRIP

- Hold regular follow-up meetings with individuals and the group post-trip. Hold them accountable as to how they are applying what they learned and continuing to engage with missions. Consider holding these meetings 1-, 3- and 6- months post-trip.
- Identify individuals who God may be calling to serve long-term or in an ongoing capacity. Connect them to resources and help disciple them into this calling (see below how TEAM can help).
- Challenge participants to engage in mission in their local community by serving their neighbor immigrants and refugees.
- Help participants consider the paradigm: “Success in missions happens when it leads to more missions: More giving, praying, going, sending, welcoming, learning.” How are they called to engage in these types of “missions?”



In Luke 10, Jesus sends out 72 people to serve on short-term trips in His authority. What happened?

They came back leaping in joy that they saw the power of His name work through them to see a great result!

They were never the same because they saw what happened when they hid themselves in Him and allowed His Spirit to work through them to bring life to others.

This type of transformation short-term trips should aim for: a joy as the result of participation in the Gospel and a vision for more ministry/mission.

He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go!”



How TEAM Can Help

TEAM work(s) with you.

TEAM partners with churches to engage missions through short-term, mid-term, and long-term missions sending. Our short-term department offers pre-trip training, on-trip development, and post-trip debriefing. When people have been on a trip and want to take a next step, we encourage a 1-3 month missions cohort experience or a longer internship. Our Missions Coaches can help walk with (and help you walk with) people interested in serving in missions longer-term.

Visit our website for additional resources by clicking below.

TEAM Church Resources