

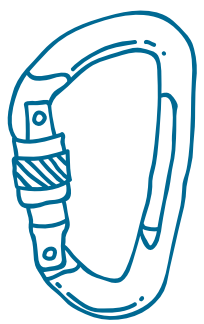
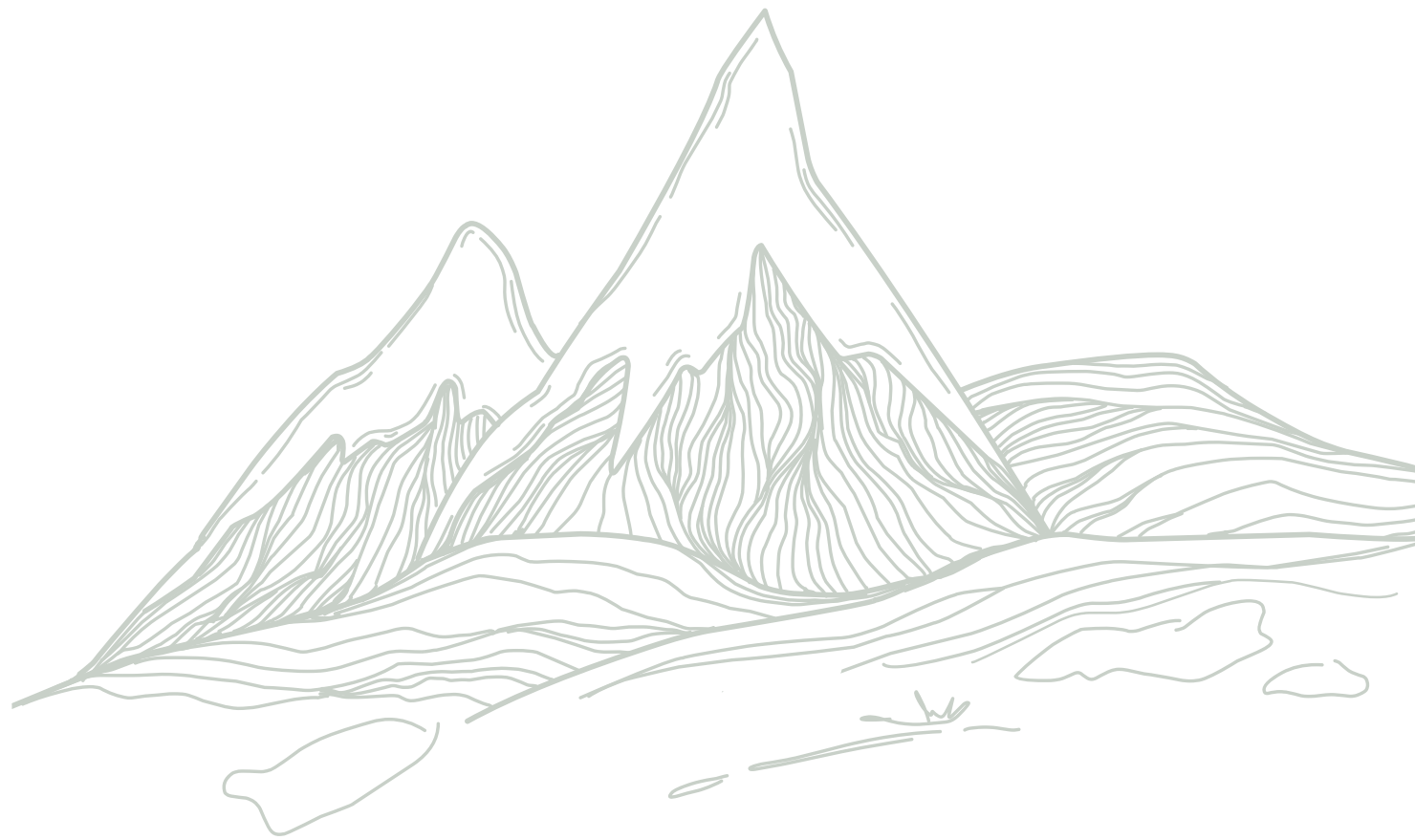
DEBRIEFS

— MOUNTAINTOPS —

The forgotten key to lasting transformation
through short-term missions



Short-term mission trips aren't going away—but the questions surrounding them keep growing. Do they truly make a difference? Are they forming disciples or just creating experiences?



Here's the reality: the impact of a trip isn't decided while you're on the field, it's determined afterward.

Participating in a short-term missions trip is much like climbing a mountain. There are distinct phases everyone walks through—each one necessary, but not always given the attention it deserves:

- **Preparation**
- **Ascent**
- **Mountaintop**
- **Descent**
- **Return home**

Most of our energy naturally builds toward the “mountaintop.” We plan, fundraise, train, and anticipate what God will do. Then we arrive on the trip itself and experience powerful moments: relationships are formed, prayers are answered, and perspectives are stretched.

But here's what many people miss: in mountain climbing, the journey isn't over at the summit. In fact, the most dangerous (and often most important) part is still ahead.

The descent matters more than the peak.



It requires focus, care, and intentionality. Climbers who neglect the descent risk losing everything they gained on the way up. In the same way, a missions trip isn't complete when the plane lands back home. Without a thoughtful, guided descent, without debrief, we risk misunderstanding what happened, losing what God was doing in us, or returning unchanged.

The reality:

A short-term missions trip without a meaningful debrief is an incomplete experience.

The problem:

When short-term trips are more about **doing** than **becoming**.

The solution:

Transformation, precipitated by an experience, and solidified through **debrief**.

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

Debriefing is where the trip becomes more than a memory. It's where experiences turn into insight, emotions become clarity, and moments with God take root in a way that shapes how we live going forward.



If the mountaintop is where we encounter God in a unique way, the debrief is where we learn to carry that encounter into everyday life.

An incredible trip can be wasted if we try to stay at the peak, without taking the intentional steps to descend well.

When we descend with care, we don't just come home... we come home transformed, ready for what's next.

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

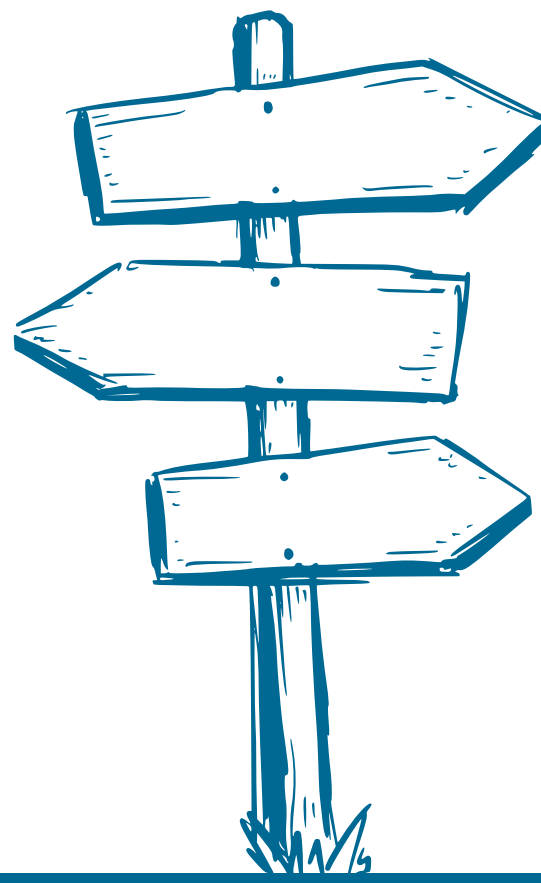
When a missions trip is processed well, it doesn't just end—it multiplies.

DEBRIEF TOOL

A debrief acts like a compass, helping participants navigate the terrain of their experience while also charting the course for continued growth, formation, and calling.



A comprehensive debrief doesn't happen by accident; it requires intentional reflection, honest processing, and meaningful conversation. It should include both **past-experience processing** and **future-oriented discernment**, done both **individually** and in **community**.



The tool on the next page is designed to help you engage all four dimensions of a healthy debrief. Each “direction” matters. Skipping one can leave the process incomplete.

- **Solo questions** are meant for personal reflection and prayerful processing.
- **Community questions** are designed to be explored with trusted voices—friends, mentors, pastors, or teammates who can help you see what you might miss on your own.
- **Past reflection questions** are for looking back on an experience 3-6 weeks after its conclusion
- **Future discernment questions** are to seek what is next and how God is moving you forward as a result of your experience

COMMUNITY

- How did you see God at work in me during this experience?
- Where did you see me thrive? Where did you see me struggle?
- What growth or change stood out to you during the trip?

- What changes have you seen in me since returning?
- How do you see God continuing to form or use me?
- Where might God be inviting me to step deeper into transformation or calling?

PAST REFLECTION

- What were my expectations going into this trip? How were they met or unmet?
- Where did I clearly experience God? What brought joy? What brought frustration?
- What moments or interactions are still lingering with me and why?

FUTURE DISCERNMENT

- What do I need from God in this season of returning home?
- What changes have I already seen in myself since the trip?
- How might God be shaping my priorities, habits, or direction moving forward?



SOLO

CONCLUSION

Mountaintops are powerful experiences — but it doesn't matter how incredible the view is if you lose your footing on the way down. The same is true of a missions trip or any other “mountaintop” experience.



As a leader, pastor, or guide, part of your role isn't just to prepare participants for the ascent—it's to help them navigate the descent with equal, if not greater, care.



While the ascent is fueled by anticipation and adrenaline, the descent often comes when energy fades and normal life resumes. Yet this is precisely what makes debrief so critical.

It is in this space when people are more reflective, open, and aware of both the highs and the tensions of their experience. This is where true formation can happen.



Debrief is not an optional add-on. It is the bridge between experience and transformation.

When done well, it ensures that what happened on the mountain doesn't stay there, but becomes integrated into a life of ongoing mission.

HOW TEAM CAN HELP

TEAM believes that success in missions only happens when it leads to more missions: more praying, more giving, more going, more sending, more learning. TEAM partners with churches to engage missions through short-term, mid-term, and long-term missions. Our short-term department offers pre-trip training, on-trip development, and post-trip debriefing. Our intentionally designed short-term program, TEAMtrek, is an invitation to experience missions, discover your calling, and journey with Jesus. Our Missions Coaches can help walk with (and help you walk with) people interested in serving in missions longer-term.



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