

Time Out

Group Bible Studies for Short-term Mission Trips

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| 1. | Mandate for Mission | Genesis 12:1-3 Exodus 19:5-6
Psalm 67:1-2 Matthew 28:19-20 Acts 1:8
Revelation 7:9 |
| 2. | Sharing your testimony | Acts 26:1-32 |
| 3. | Staying spiritually fresh | Mark 1:35-37 Mark 6:30-32
Psalm 1:1-3 Jeremiah 17:5-8 |
| 4. | Culture and its importance | 1Corinthians 9:19-27 |
| 5. | The impact of worldview | Acts 14:8-20 |
| 6. | The greatest thing of all | 1Corinthians 13 |
| 7. | Relationships | ‘One another’ verses |
| 8. | Teamwork | Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 1Corinthians 12:12-26
Romans 12:3-8 Ephesians 4:16 |
| 9. | Incarnational ministry | John 20:21 and 1:14 1John 1:1 1Thess 2:8
Philippians 2:6-11 |
| 10. | Mission as caring | James 2:14-25 Matthew 25:31-46 |
| 11. | Mission as social justice | Micah 6:8 Amos 5:21-24
Isaiah 58:6-12 |
| 12. | Coping with pressure | 2Corinthians 1:3-11 |
| 13. | Mission as warfare | Ephesians 6:10-20 |
| 14. | Home Again (re-entry) | Acts 14:26-28 Acts 21:4-6 Psalm 121 |
| 15. | Living on Purpose | 1Corinthians 9:24-27 Jeremiah 29:11
Ephesians 2:10 Matthew 6:33 and 16:24-26
Matthew 28:16-20 |

How to use this material

1. These studies have been prepared for use by teams or individuals engaged in short-term mission, to help you make the most of the experience, to think about cultural issues, and to reflect on your time overseas.
2. There are 15 studies on various topics, so that for teams who go for about 3 weeks, there is enough material for one study each day. Groups going for longer periods can use the studies weekly; those going for shorter periods can use the studies that are most relevant. Although there is a progression behind the order of the studies, they do not have to be followed in the sequence given.
3. Groups that can meet together before the trip (for example, those from the same church or Christian Union), could begin the studies before they go, as part of their preparation and getting to know each other.
4. It is assumed that teams will want to include time for worship together as well as opportunity for prayer. Depending how long you have for your 'team time', you can complete the whole study or just selected sections. Depending on the amount of discussion they should take 30-45 minutes.
5. If there is time for people to look at the notes beforehand this will increase the benefit of the studies and the effectiveness of your time together. Group leaders should certainly make themselves familiar with the study before leading the group. Guide the discussion gently but firmly in the right direction, and aim to finish on time.
6. The studies are designed to be interactive and thought provoking, and so it is hoped that individuals will share their own thought and insights with the rest of the group. To enable this to happen easily, the more talkative members of the group might need to hold back from time-to-time to make sure they don't dominate the discussion.
7. The studies are based on the NIV, although any of the other main versions would be just as appropriate.
8. Any feedback on the studies will be welcomed, along with further ideas for relevant topics.

Have a great trip! Learn lots and be a blessing!

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Mandate for Mission

Mission is not an optional extra for a fanatical few within the church. Mission expresses the heartbeat of God, for God is a missionary God, and the Bible is a missionary book. The theme of God's saving grace for the nations pulsates on every page, and should find a resonance in the hearts of all who take His Word seriously.

Genesis 12: 1-3 All peoples blessed through Abram (Abraham)

The call of Abram is one of the key moments in the unfolding drama of redemption, as God's plan of salvation kicks into action.

What does God promise to Abram? How will this affect others? What do you think it means to say we are 'blessed to be a blessing'?

What did this call mean practically to Abram? How is his call a prototype of the way God works in our lives?

How did your own call to mission come about?

Exodus 19:5-6 Israel's calling

God's people share a similar call to make Him known throughout the world.

What does God say about His feeling for Israel? What two purposes does he have in mind for them? How do worship and witness go together?

Psalms 67:1-7 Harvest Blessing

This Psalm, sang at harvest time, was a constant reminder of Israel's privilege and responsibility. They often forgot their calling, but God always brought them back to their main purpose.

What did a good harvest signify? What did they pray (a) for themselves, and (b) what did they desire for the nations?

Matthew 28:19-20 The church's reason for existence

Long before 'mission statements' were the fashion, the church had one! Sometimes called the Great Commission, these final words of Jesus give us our mandate for action.

What are we called to do? What activities make this happen? What promise accompanies those who step out in obedience?

Acts 1:8 Power to get the job done

Whatever our theology of the Holy Spirit, we must know the reality of His power at work in our lives. Mission cannot be accomplished in our own strength or by human ability alone.

Why has God given us the Holy Spirit? Where are we to be witnesses?

Revelation 7:9-10 The vision set before us

It is good to keep in mind a vision of what God has in mind, to visualize the future, when the complete church of Jesus Christ will be finally gathered together.

What strikes you most about John's vision? How can it inspire us in the task of mission?

Sharing your Testimony

As an 'honoured' guest in your host country, you will almost always be invited to bring a word of greeting when you visit different places. Your hosts will love to hear about your family, and the things you do back home, as well as why you have come to their country, and what you think about it.

This may also provide you with an opportunity to tell your faith story. People love hearing about other people, and your testimony of how God has worked in your life thus far is one of your most precious resources. Remember that it may not be appropriate in more 'conservative' cultures to share too much detail about your past sins (eg drugs, sex, alcohol).

Acts 26:1-32 Paul's testimony

Paul finds himself on trial before King Agrippa, but uses the opportunity to tell his story. Notice how what he says can be divided up into 3 phases or movements.

Before he believed in Jesus (v4-11)

*What does Paul say about his childhood?
And about his beliefs as a Jew?
His attitude towards Christians?*

His conversion (v12-18)

*What were the circumstances that led to his becoming a believer?
What commission was he given by Jesus?
Why do you think the experience changed him so dramatically?*

His new life (v19-23)

*How did Paul respond? What difference did it make to his life?
Why is he now on trial?*

Paul's testimony can be a pattern for you to model your own sharing upon. Think of your own story under these three headings:

- (a) my life before I became a Christian
- (b) the things that led up to me becoming a Christian
- (c) how my life has changed since

Give opportunity for each person in the team to share their testimony very briefly (no more than 5 minutes). If you are a large team you may want to do this over a few days.

Sharing your testimonies together can also help you to understand and appreciate each other better. Pray for each other as well after you have shared, giving thanks to God for the grace that has brought each of you into a personal relationship with Himself.

Staying Spiritually Fresh

There is no doubt that your trip will take a lot out of you. In adjusting to another culture we use up a tremendous amount of psychological energy, and for some people, being with others all the time is also draining. You will need to give each other space. On top of this some people will be doing demanding work physically, whilst others are giving out emotionally in caring for people or in ministering spiritually. Don't be surprised if you feel more tired than usual.

Mark 1:35-37 The secret of Jesus

No one was busier than Jesus, yet his life was marked by calmness under pressure and closeness to his Father. His secret was his rhythm of life, constantly withdrawing from the daily demands in order to refresh his spirit by being alone with God.

What can we learn from his example?

How can you find time for group devotions as well as time individually with God?

Why do you think this is important?

Mark 6:30-32 Looking after yourself

Right at the beginning of their ministry, Jesus teaches the disciples how to maintain a balance between work and rest, between activity and intimacy.

How was ministry affecting their lifestyle? How did Jesus correct this imbalance? What are the implications for you?

Psalms 1:1-3 The place of refreshment

The more we give out, the more we must take in. Looking after our souls (soul-care) is vitally important in ministry as a safeguard against spiritual burnout.

Where does the Psalmist find spiritual refreshment? What does he do to ensure his fruitfulness?

What does it mean to meditate on the scripture?

Jeremiah 17:5-8 A God dependent life

Here is a contrast between a tree that is parched and barren, and one that is fruitful and verdant. Each tree represents a different person or approach to life.

What is the key difference between the two?

How is the context of this passage different to that of Psalm 1?

How do you express your dependency on God? How do you nourish your soul?

Let the group share ways in which together, and as individuals, you can stay close to God.

Culture and its importance

Culture can be defined in a variety of ways, but the simplest definition is *‘the way we do things here.’* Every group has its own way of doing things, and in order to belong to that group you must be willing to adapt to its ways. Culture covers the way we behave, the values we hold, and the way we think or look at life. It affects the way we dress, eat our food, make our homes, live our lives. It touches every aspect of life – music, architecture, religion, politics and so on.

Every one has their own culture, and normally we think that our culture is the best! Other cultures are judged according to this norm. Sometimes we only become aware of the strength of our own culture when we are impacted by another culture.

Why is it important to respect other cultures?

Share one thing that is important about your own culture. Even amongst people from the same culture there may be differences. It is good to be aware that you have your own cultural perspective.

What things have you noticed already about your host culture? What has impacted you the most - either something you like, or something you find difficult? A good watchword when entering another culture is to remember : things are not necessarily wrong, they are just different.

The world of the first century into which the church was born was a very multi-cultural world, and the apostle Paul and others moved across cultural boundaries to take the gospel to others.

1Corinthians 9:19-27

Paul’s philosophy of ministry

Paul identifies four different groups of people.

Can you identify each one, and say what was distinctive about each?

Paul adapted his approach to each of these different groups.

How did he do this?

In order to do this, what kind of person did Paul need to be? What qualities or characteristics are necessary in those who attempt to work across cultures?

Notice that the context is about ‘rights’. Western society makes a lot about the ‘rights’ of various groups, but Paul seemed willing to give up his ‘rights’ as an apostle in order that the gospel might reach as many people as possible.

What ‘rights’ may you need to give up during this trip?

The illustration taken from athletics would have been very familiar to those in Corinth where the famous Isthmian Games were held.

What point(s) do you think he is trying to make, and how does his teaching challenge those of us involved in cross-cultural ministry?

NB You may want to come back to this study again later in the trip when cultural differences are more apparent.

The Impact of worldview

At the heart of every individual culture is what we call our ‘worldview’, the way of understanding and interpreting the world we live in. Our worldview acts like a map, helping us to make sense of the world and navigate our way through life and its happenings.

Our worldview is constructed from what our parents teach us, the things we learn at school and from our friends, and the society we grow up in, and so on. The media, and the events of our personal lives shape it, as well as the history, religious background, and political context of our own country.

What kind of things have shaped your own worldview? What things might have shaped the worldview of those in your host country? How will these be different from your own experience?

Acts 14:8-20

Preaching the gospel cross-culturally

The healing of a crippled man leads Paul and Barnabas into in confused and dangerous situation, brought about largely by a clash of worldviews.

By looking at the passage carefully, try and re-construct what you can about the culture, beliefs and worldview of the people of Lystra. See v11-13

Apparently there was a local legend that the gods Zeus and Hermes had once visited this area disguised as mortal men, but were rebuffed by most people. Only an elderly couple took them in. Later this couple were rewarded by the gods, whilst catastrophic flood was punishment for the others. *How might this part of their world-view be influencing their response to Paul and Barnabas?*

The response of Paul and Barnabas to this is very instructive. Firstly they deflect attention from themselves, and secondly they take the opportunity to share the gospel, but in a way that connects with their hearers and their worldview.

How do they seek to defuse the situation?

How do they preach the gospel in this context? What do they say about God? What point of contact do they make with the people? What challenge do they present?

More than anything else, worldview affects cross-cultural communication, whether it be of the gospel, or even everyday conversations. Be aware of this as you settle into your host culture. Remember that people may hear what you say, but interpret it in a different way to what you expect. This can cause a lot of confusion, laughter and frustration!

How can you make use of this awareness in your communications from now on?

The Greatest thing of All

As you seek to live and work in another culture, you may well make cultural mistakes and blunders. Never mind, if people know that you truly love them, they will forgive a multitude of cultural mistakes! Indeed the key to cultural adaptation, and to ministry in general, is simply to love people with the love of God.

Here is a paraphrase of **1 Corinthians 13** written for a mission context. *Read it alongside the normal translation, comparing the two to see how it interprets what Paul says in the original. Work through it section by section.*

I may be able to speak fluently the language of my chosen field,
and even understand its culture,
but if I have no love,
the impact of my speech is no more than that of a businessman who comes to exploit the people.

I may have the gift of contextualising* God's Word when I deliver it to my hearers;
I may have all knowledge about their customs;
I may have the faith to combat witchcraft;
but if I have no love, I am nothing.

I may give everything I have to the poor,
to the hungry in the favellas*;
I may even give my life for them, but if I have no love, this does no good.

Love is....
thinking in their thought patterns,
caring enough to understand their worldview,
listening to their questions,
feeling their burdens,
respecting them,
identifying with them in their need,
belonging to them.

Love is eternal.
Cultures pass away.
Dynamic equivalents will change because cultures change.
Patterns of worship and church administration will need revision.
Languages will be altered over time, institutions will be replaced.
Since I am finite I can only study how to express the Message cross-culturally,
trying to free it from my cultural bias.
I am able to do this only in a limited way, but I pray the Spirit will use my life to show Christ to those with whom I work.

Meanwhile these three remain...
Identification, contextualisation and love,
But the greatest of these is love.

Jean McCracken, Sao Paulo, Brazil

(*favellas = slums *Contextualisation = putting the gospel message into a new context or setting)

Relationships

Working together with a team of other people in a cross-cultural setting can provide its own challenges. Sometimes it is not easy to get on with each other, and the pressure of living in another culture can make us touchy and irritable with each other. Good relationships do not happen automatically, we have to work at them. Some of the 'one another' verses in the New Testament emphasize how important relationships are, and how to keep them in good repair.

Why do you think good relationship within your team are important? How will your inter-relationships affect (a) how you enjoy the trip, (b) the effectiveness of your work, and (c) your witness to your hosts?

Romans 15:7 and John 13:34

What does it mean to accept or love one another? On what basis are we called to do this? What is the result when we do?

Galatians 5:13 and 6:2

How might you be able to serve one another over the next few days or weeks? What burdens (apart from your luggage!) might you be able to bear for each other?

Ephesians 5:21 and Galatians 5:26

Why do you think mutual submission is important in a team context? Why is it sometimes difficult to submit to authority? What does Paul warn against that could threaten the unity of your team?

Colossians 3:12-14 and Ephesians 4:2-3

Forgiving one another becomes essential in community living. What attitudes make this easier? What incentives do we have? What resources are available to us?

James 5:16

Look at the wider context of this verse. Why is it important to pray for one another? And to confess our sins? How does this affect our prayers?

Hebrews 10:24 Romans 15:14

What does it mean to 'spur' each other on? What is the purpose of this? Why is it important to instruct (admonish) one another?

You can be sure that Satan will seek to undermine the unity of your team whilst you are working together. If you will follow the principles of this study he will not be able to find a way in. He will be defeated and you will be victorious.

8 Teamwork

Because people are placed together in a team does not mean that they will work as a team. For various reasons that may not happen. Teamwork depends on sharing a common goal, with each team member having the right attitude and making the appropriate contribution.

Teamwork is... the ability to work together towards a common vision
the ability to direct individual accomplishment towards the group's objectives
the fuel that allows ordinary people to attain extraordinary results

Simply stated it is less me, and more we.

Why do think some groups never work as a team?

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

These verses give a powerful picture of teamwork and the synergy that it produces.

Why according to these verses are two better than one? Consider each example given in turn and relate it to the work God has given you to do.

1 Corinthians 12:14-27

The analogy of the body is one that Paul often uses, and it helpfully describes teamwork and what it means to be part of a team.

What are the key lessons that come out of this illustration?

Romans 12:3-8

Again Paul uses the analogy of the body to show how important it is that each of us makes the contribution that God has designed us for.

Why is it important to think of ourselves with 'sober judgment'? Whilst this list is not meant to be exhaustive, are there any of the gifts mentioned here that you identify in yourself, or in your fellow team mates? What other contributions can you make?

Ephesians 4:16

According to this verse, what are the two key things for a healthy body? How does each apply to team work and team dynamics? Why is it important to keep closely connected to Christ as the Head of the body?

Teams go through various stages as they develop. (1) Forming – as they are first put together; (2) Storming – as individuals find their place in the team; (3) Norming – as they develop harmony between themselves; (4) Performing – when they start to be effective as a group.

What stage are you at? How can you move on to the 'performing' stage?

Incarnational Ministry

By ‘incarnational ministry’ we mean getting alongside people and serving them by becoming one with them. Rather than being like tourists who only dip into another culture, and never share the lives of their hosts, servants of Christ seek to identify themselves with the cares and concerns of those whom God has placed them amongst.

John 20:21 The coming of Jesus a model for us

As Jesus sends out his disciples, he reminds them of his own mission, sent into the world by the Father. This is the pattern he has for us too.

What was involved in the Father sending the Son? What do you think Jesus has in mind here?

John 1:14 God with skin on

The coming of God in human form is called the incarnation (= in flesh), and this is what we celebrate at Christmas.

What do you think is the significance of (a) the Word becoming flesh, and (b) his dwelling among us? What are the implications of this for the way we do mission?

1John 1:1-2 Touch and see

Cross-cultural ministry is very much about ‘fleshing out’ the life of Christ for others to see. God does not send angels or e-mails, he sends real people! Part of the vulnerability of mission is that we might lose some of our ‘right’ to privacy, but it is important that we are accessible to people of the host culture.

What things does John say they were able to do because the life appeared? How can you make yourself available and accessible to others during this trip? What does it mean to say that in your coming to your place of service ‘the life appeared’?

1 Thessalonians 2:8 Sharing ourselves

Paul seemed to have followed this incarnational model of ministry, becoming one with those he went to serve, and identifying himself with them in the way he lived.

What attitude motivated his actions? What did he share beyond the gospel message?

Philippians 2:5-11 Hymn to Christ

This great hymn shows us what was involved for Christ as he became a man and dwelt amongst us. His sacrifice began at the manger, not at the cross.

What attitudes did Jesus display in the incarnation? How can you build them into your own lives and ministry? How will this affect the way you live and work on this trip?

Mission as Caring

If we have a narrow view of mission we may well think of it only in terms of preaching the gospel and planting churches, but it is equally important that we demonstrate God's love to others in practical ways. God is concerned for our bodies as well as our souls. In caring for others we are expressing God's heart and making his love tangible.

It was Francis of Assisi who said, 'Preach the gospel and use words if you have to.'
What do you think he meant?

James 2:14-25 **Faith and works belong together**

Evangelical Christians have sometimes been afraid of losing the cutting edge of the gospel by becoming too involved in social activity, but ideally the two go hand in hand.

According to James, how does real, living faith express itself (v14-17)?

Why is faith as assent to doctrinal truth insufficient (v18-19)?

How do the stories of both Abraham and Rahab illustrate the principle that true faith will always express itself in appropriate action (v20-26)?

The key statement here seems to be this: his faith and his actions were working together.

How do you see this being worked out in your own life?

If you are involved in a practical project (eg building a school, digging wells, etc), how do you think this is helping the gospel, and the church where you are serving?

Matthew 25:31-46 **The sheep and the goats**

Jesus here makes it clear that there will be a time of separation, when the sheep (genuine followers) will be separated from the goats (the not so genuine).

Surprisingly, what will be the basis for this separation?

Can you see any connection between what Jesus says here, and what you saw in James?

What strikes us about the goodness of the righteous is that it is entirely unselfconscious. This is not good works being done to gain favour or merit with God, but the unselfconscious outflow of the compassionate life of Christ within them.

Identify the different groups mentioned by Jesus. How had each been helped?

The key verse here is v40 – 'whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

How does Jesus identify himself with the marginalized?

What difference does it make to recognize that in helping the needy we are actually serving Christ?

Mission as Social Justice

Mission is meant to be holistic – that is, it is about helping people in the whole of their lives, and in the context of where they live their lives. We cannot share the message of the gospel and yet remain indifferent to the wider issues that affect the lives of those to whom God has sent us.

The Old Testament prophets continually reminded Israel of her social obligations. It was all too easy for them to become ‘religious’ and to ignore the injustices that were happening all around them.

Micah 6:8 **What God requires**

What 3 things make up true religion as far as the prophet is concerned? What is it that God is looking for in our lives?

Amos 5:21-24 **Empty religion**

What does the prophet despise? What does he see God as looking for? Is there a danger here for contemporary western Christians?

Isaiah 58:6-12 **True fasting**

It is very easy for people to get caught up with religious practices and duties, and become totally disconnected from the world around them, that may well be crying out in pain. Here the prophet looks beyond the religious practice of fasting, to see a life that truly pleases God – one that is immersed in helping others and in correcting the things that are wrong in society.

What specific examples are given in v6-7?

What other things are mentioned in v9-10?

As you think about these things, what concerns do you have about your own society back home?

And without being critical or judgmental, what needs do you see in the society of your host culture?

As a visitor to another country, it may well not be your place to correct the injustices you see, and as a member of a short-term team you may not be able to make a huge impact anyway; *but how can all this change your attitudes, your lifestyle and maybe your Christian life?*

Notice the blessing that seems to accompany a life that takes care of the needy (v8-9 and v11-12). It is as if in losing our lives, we find them!

What are the blessings of life freed from self-centredness, and poured out in service of others?

Coping with Pressure

No doubt you have realized by now that life is sometimes pressured, and that cross-cultural ministry brings its own unique set of stress factors. From living together in close proximity, to the uncertainties and frustrations of adjusting to another culture, there are many things to send our stress levels soaring.

As a group share some of the pressure-points you have encountered so far. What was it that made these events stressful?

Each of us is different of course is what causes stress for us, and also in our ability to cope with it. Some who like to be highly organized and have life under control can be thrown into a spin when things don't go according to plan. Others are more laid back, and go with the flow, but get stressed by too many deadlines and or restrictions on their freedom.

Which one of these would you most identify with?

2Corinthians 1:3-11 When the pressure's on

Paul is here describing a particular phase of ministry that had been extremely stressful, perhaps more intense than most of us will encounter, but instructive just the same.

The actual situation is described in v8-9. *What can we learn about what Paul was facing?*

At moments of stress and pressure, our understanding of God is vitally important, because we will respond to God in the way in which we think of him deep in our hearts. If we think he is ready to help, we will be comforted; if we think he is distant and remote, we will panic.

What clues does this passage give us about how Paul thinks of God? How would his understanding of God have helped him to cope with pressure?

An interesting perspective on this kind of suffering is that it happens for a purpose, and there are lessons to be learnt from it.

How does Paul understand what happened to him? Why did God allow it? What had they learnt through it?

One author wrote a book with the title 'Don't waste your sorrows'. Part of God's agenda in allowing us to be stretched in our faith is to develop character within us (patient endurance v 6).

What other beneficial by-product is mentioned in v4-6?

It is important in a team context that team members support each other in prayer and by words of encouragement. There will be times when each one will feel the pressure and will need to be encouraged by the others. Give encouragement freely to each other, and don't be too proud to receive it either.

Notice v11 – 'as you help us by your prayers'. Take heart from the fact that others are praying for you today.

Mission as warfare

One thing you may well realize as you begin to work in another culture, is that the spiritual conflict is more intense and much more on the surface. Whereas in the west Satan seems to play a hidden game, in other cultures he is much more open and visible in his activities. This may well affect the work you are trying to do for Jesus, as it is more likely to be resisted by powers of darkness that have long been entrenched there. There may be days when the battle is very fierce!

Ephesians 6:10-20**Ready for the fight**

The apostle Paul clearly saw himself engaged in a 'spiritual' battle against Satan and demonic forces. Although hidden, this conflict is real, and we need to be prepared for it.

1. Find strength in God (v10)

It is important not to try and do things in your own strength, but to depend heavily on God. Your weakness is a good thing if it makes you rely more on Him. We need not be afraid for God is with us.

How can you tap into the strength of God? What other scriptures remind you of Christ's victory?

2. Recognise your enemy (v11-12)

The apostle, whose worldview clearly included a demonic realm, albeit defeated by Christ and under his authority, exposes Satan's kingdom.

What can you learn about the nature of Satan and his kingdom from these verses?

What evidence of his activity have you seen on the trip so far, or in your host culture so far?

3. Wear the armour of God (v13-16)

God has provided for your protection, so there is nothing to fear, but it is important to consciously appropriate every piece of the armour he has given you, and to stand in it every day.

Consider carefully each item of gospel armour. What does it represent? Are you wearing it?

4. Use your weapons (v17-18)

Two powerful weapons are at our disposal – scripture (the sword of the Spirit), and prayer. We need to use both to resist the devil and make our stand against him.

Why is the word of God described as 'the sword of the Spirit'?

How can prayer make a difference?

14 Home Again

For many people, returning home again after a time in another culture can be a difficult experience. Don't underestimate the impact that an experience in the developing world can have on you. It is worth giving some time to thinking through the issues of 're-entry' before you face them.

Acts 14:26-28 **Reporting back**

One aspect of returning home is the opportunity to share with your church, and those who supported you, how the trip went.

What did Paul and his companions share with the church in Antioch?

Think over what have been the highlights of the trip for you. How have you seen God at work? Without either false modesty or boastful arrogance, what has God done through you? How have you seen him at work?

It is worth writing down some of the key aspects of the trip in case you forget them later on. Think about what souvenirs you can take back to illustrate any talks you might be asked to give. Make sure you've got some photographs of people and places.

Acts 21:4-6 **Saying Goodbye**

It is important to leave well, and as they say, to establish 'closure'.

How did Paul and his friends do that?

How might you as a group say goodbye (a) to your hosts, and (b) to each other?

Make sure that you express your appreciation for others, and as far as you can, be reconciled with anyone who has hurt or offended you.

Psalm 121 **The Lord watches over you**

The same God who led you out will also bring you safely home. As you re-adjust to life at home again, watch out for reverse culture shock. Being overseas will have changed you, and you may find it hard to settle in again because (a) you miss the rest of the team, or (b) your value system has been radically altered by your time abroad.

What promise(s) does this Psalm contain to encourage you?

Share with each other how you feel you have changed as a result of the trip. Think especially about your values and outlook on life, as well as in your relationship with God.

If the trip has brought up some difficult issues for you, you may like to talk these over with a trusted friend or church leader. Whatever you do, don't bury them – talk them through when you are ready.

Living on Purpose

How do you see your mission trip in the context of your whole life? Is it just a one-off venture, something you will quickly put behind there in a 'been there, done that' kind of way? Or is it something that could make a difference to the rest of your life? It is important to take time to evaluate your overseas experience, and at the same time to review your life's purpose.

1Corinthians 9:24-27 **Having an aim in life**

It is important to have an aim in life, to find a purpose that integrates the way we live and guides the decisions we make. An aimless life is not only unproductive, it is also unsatisfying. Paul had a clear purpose for his own life.

*From these verses, what would you say that aim was?
And how did it affect the way he lived?*

Jeremiah 29:11 and Ephesians 2:10 **Finding God's plan for your life**

It may surprise you to know that God has a plan for your life. There is a reason why he made you and why he saved you – so that you could be part of his plan to save the world.

What encouragement do these two verses give us to believe that (a) we can know God's will for our lives and (b) it is achievable?

Matthew 6:33 and 16:24-26 **Radical discipleship**

Jesus calls us to a 'whole-life' faith, a discipleship that takes his claim to our allegiance seriously, and is willing to live it out no matter what the cost.

*Does Jesus have first place in your life? What rivals are there to his pre-eminence?
How do his words challenge you? What is he getting at?*

Matthew 28:16-20 **Commissioned**

Someone has said that the Great Commission contained in these verses is *my* commission. Tom Sine makes this comment. 'Every disciple of Jesus is called to a whole-life faith in which mission is at the centre of our lives and families instead of at the margins.'

Reflect on this statement in the light of your overseas experience.
How can you build on what God has done in your life? How can you continue an involvement in mission?

By thinking about longer-term mission? Becoming an advocate for missions in your church or group? Supporting a mission agency or overseas worker? Joining a prayer group? Keeping in touch? Adopting a simpler lifestyle? Working for justice and equality? Getting further training? Exploring opportunities for Christian service?

Whatever you do, go forwards in your discipleship not backwards. Your life can make a difference, and there is no telling what God can do with a life given over to His purposes! Go for it!