

A sunburst graphic consisting of numerous thin, white, dashed lines radiating outwards from the center of the text, creating a starburst effect.

LIVE  
YOUR  
MISSION

*m*

# Welcome

This mission trip journal contains daily devotional meditations on EM's Healthy Service Principles, including scripture readings and personal reflection questions.

Open it up each morning, mid-day, or before you go to sleep—however you like! We hope it provides space for you to learn, grow, and reflect while serving others during this experience.

- *The EM Team*

*NOTE: All scripture quoted in this journal is taken from New International Version (NIV). If different, we invite you to also read from your personal Bible to get an even fuller picture of these passages and their meaning.*

# 1. Is this trip about you?

Before coming, there was a lot of focus on you and your group as you met each other, fundraised, made travel plans, or prepared to serve. But one of the biggest challenges you will face on this trip is remembering that this trip is ultimately not about you.

**Every mission trip is an opportunity to enter into the story of others,** shifting your focus from your own daily life and concerns to the people in this community. It's an opportunity to let go of your expectations and desires, and approach each day with open hands to receive what God has for you through ministry, work projects, learning opportunities, and new relationships. When we remove ourselves from the center of the story and recognize that we are actually part of one big story God is weaving in the world, we open our eyes to all the unexpected ways God is moving in and around us and in this community.

Read the following scripture excerpts from Paul's letter to the Philippians, and begin to consider what it means to truly "value others above yourselves" in all the different spaces you enter this week.

## **Philippians 2:3-7**

*"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."*

## **Philippians 2:14-16**

*"Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.' Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain."*

## **Reflection**

*In what ways have you been thinking about yourself as the center of the story of this mission trip?*

*How might you begin to "look to the interest of others"?*

*Write out a short prayer, reflecting on your mindset coming in and asking God to help you engage the community with humility and love this week.*

## 2. What does it mean to be a guest?

There's a pretty big difference between a *tourist* and a *guest*. Tourists glide from one place to the next, looking to see the sites, collect experiences (and souvenirs), and get enough photos to share back home. Guests, on the other hand, step into the lives of their hosts, taking the time to understand the life and rhythm of the people they have been invited to visit.

**On a mission trip, it's important to take the posture of a guest.** This means approaching this experience with respect for what's already here. Adapting to the way things are done in this community. This includes everything from appreciating what food is prepared (no matter how different it is to what we're used to) to how fast or slow each day feels (even if we feel the pull to do more or less).

When we show up eager to listen and learn from hosts, partner ministries, and local community members—instead of being the ones setting the agenda—we are a walking picture of God's love through the way we honor this community.

As you read the scriptures below, look for ways to engage as a humble guest in this community, open to what may come.

### Galatians 5:13-15

*"You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."*

### Mark 10:45

*"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

## Reflection

*Are you naturally more inclined to go through life as a tourist or a guest? How will that affect your ability to make an impact on people you meet this week?*

*You are free to do whatever you choose! How can you use the freedom given to you by God to honor your hosts in this community?*

*Take a moment to reflect on the simple and profound command to "love your neighbor as yourself." How might that look differently during this trip than back at home? How might it look the same?*

### 3. Don't miss the goodness

It is a hard truth about the world we live in that some people have more opportunities than others. You can see this as disparity, privilege, or simply “the way things are”, but it's important to recognize when we have been given an opportunity and not take it for granted.

It is a rare thing to have the time and resources (or the support of generous donors) to afford to travel to a new place and serve in someone else's community. If we view this as simply something fun we get to do or as an item checked off our spiritual bucket list, we will miss the goodness God has for us.

**Take the time today to recognize all you get to be part of this week.** You get to wake up each day this week to serve, learn, and grow in our faith in community with others. You get to give out of our abundance of time, attention, and resources to join in the meaningful work and ministry already happening in this community. You get to see God move in ways we couldn't possibly imagine.

As you read the scriptures below, consider your approach to this experience, and thank God for the opportunity in front of you today.

#### **James 4:13-15**

*“Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.”*

#### **1 Thessalonians 1:11-12**

*“With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

### **Reflection**

*Think about all the good things you “get to” be part of during this trip! Take a moment to thank God for these gifts.*

*Where have you seen God at work so far this week?*

*How can you give out of your abundance (of time, talents, resources, and energy) during this trip and also after you return home?*

## 4. What are you here for?

What is the “goal” of a mission trip? It can be easy to assume it's simply to complete whatever project you've been assigned to this week. Or maybe it's to put on a great outreach program. Or do as much work as possible in the small amount of time you're here. But all of these goals are missing one key ingredient: *meaningful interactions with real people.*

At Experience Mission, we believe **people are the most important part of every mission trip.** Regardless of each person's circumstances or perceived needs (that we may be able to help meet in small and big ways), we must never forget our goal is to love God by loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. This means seeing everyone we encounter as our equal, living a life just as complex as our own—with their own hopes, dreams, giftings, mistakes, ambitions, sorrows, value, worth, and dignity.

Take the time today to be thoughtful about the people you are serving this week and acknowledge our tendency to push people aside in order to maximize how much we can accomplish. How will you refocus instead on the individuals, families, and communities around you? How can you be curious, share your whole self, offer (and receive) prayer? How can you be a picture of God's love to the people here, regardless of the end goals of this week's projects?

As you read the scriptures below, consider how important people are to God, and his hope for—and mission in—the world.

### John 3:16

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

### Ephesians 2:19-22

*“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”*

## Reflection

*Has it been hard to focus on people over projects so far this week? If so, take a moment to put yourself in the position of someone being helped by your team. How would you hope volunteers coming to your community might engage with you?*

*The best way to engage a new relationship is with curiosity. Have you learned anything about the person or people living here yet? What new insights could you seek out today?*

*How might you approach the rest of your trip with more curiosity and a “people-first” mentality?*

## 5. Seeing God at work

A common question asked during Experience Mission trips is “Where have you seen God today?” Which makes total sense to us, as we have come to be a light, hoping to exude God’s love with our words and actions. But what is often missed is God’s very tangible presence in this community before you arrived.

One of the basic truths about God found in the Bible is God’s omnipresence—*He is everywhere in this world and always has been.* Which means, regardless of our good intentions, we don’t actually “bring God” anywhere. He’s already here! So our role is not to start God’s work here, but rather to join in.

**We get to walk into each day with open hearts to see God’s love and beauty at work here.** To experience his abiding presence through the people loving their community day in and day out. To participate in the love God has always been sharing with the people here through acts of service and kindness.

As you read the scriptures below, consider the ways that God has already been present in this community.

### Psalm 139:7-12

*“Where can I go from your Spirit?*

*Where can I flee from your presence?*

*If I go up to the heavens, you are there;*

*if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.*

*If I rise on the wings of the dawn,*

*if I settle on the far side of the sea,*

*even there your hand will guide me,*

*your right hand will hold me fast.*

*If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me*

*and the light become night around me,’*

*even the darkness will not be dark to you;*

*the night will shine like the day,*

*for darkness is as light to you.”*

### James 1:16-18

*“Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.”*

## Reflection

*In what ways did you see God already present in this community?*

*If “every good and perfect gift is from above”, can you name some of the good gifts God has given to this community?*

*How does reflecting on the slow work of God—that you get to join in this community—change your posture and approach to serving here?*

## 6. How does God see you?

There are over 8 billion people in the world. And we are all 100% unique. We look, act, and sound different. We make different foods, wear different clothes, listen to different music. And despite the millions of reasons we're different, we all have one thing in common: we are all created in the image of God.

This means God created humanity with incredible richness and diversity, reflecting his own creativity and life-giving spirit. So, how does God see you? As one of His own, wholly and dearly loved. And God sees all people in the exact same way.

**Following Jesus looks like seeing others the way God sees us and acting accordingly**—going out of our way to extend compassion, empathy, and love to everyone. It's not easy! We are not given permission to write people off, look the other way, or ignore injustice. But living into this reality is a major part of bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to Earth. It is how we are a picture of God's love to everyone we meet.

Read the scriptures below and reflect on how God sees you and all other people, his beloved creations, sons, and daughters.

### Psalm 139:13-16

*"For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*

*My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the  
secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of  
the earth.*

*Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me  
were written in your book before one of them came to be."*

### Romans 13:8-10

*"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt  
to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the  
law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You  
shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and  
whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this  
one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no  
harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law."*

## Reflection

*Mission trips can be hard! It is not always easy to "love your neighbor as yourself" in every circumstance we find ourselves in. What has been the most challenging for you?*

*Think about the diversity you have experienced this week, the differences between your home community and this community, the individuals you have met, and your fellow team members. Picture the faces and remind yourself that each person is made in the Image of God! There is no "other" in God's eyes. Take a moment to write about a few of the people you met and how you see the Image of God alive in them.*

## 7. What story will you tell?

This week, you have likely seen and experienced the lives of people who are struggling in some way. This could be because of natural disasters, generational poverty, systems that limit opportunities, personal choices gone wrong, or something else. But no matter how obvious their struggles are on the outside, the truth is, we all have struggles.

Some struggles are more visible than others—like poverty, lack of education, substance abuse, or living without a home—while others are hidden inside our hearts—like pride, greed, prejudice, apathy, or self-centeredness.

**As you leave this mission trip, remember that no one is “better” or “worse” because of our struggles.** We all fall short of the life we were intended to live—making selfish choices, placing ourselves above others, forgetting who God made us to be. Understanding our common human struggles allows us to learn and grow together, making space for God to bring hope and change in our lives through our honest interaction with one another.

The stories you tell about this community when you go home will shape the hearts of others for the people here and those in similar circumstances. Read the passage from James below, and challenge yourself not to settle for the simple story of outward struggle you’ve seen, but rather do your best to tell stories filled with compassion, mercy, and grace for people simply dealing with different struggles than our own.

### James 3:13-17

*“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.”*

## Reflection

*What is a “simple story” that you might be tempted to tell about this community?*

*How might you attempt to tell **more** of the story, highlighting the good and bad, the past and present, the hope you have seen?*

*Is there cultural or historical context that would help you understand this community better? How might you continue to pursue this knowledge, even after you leave?*

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