



MISSION TRIP

*Devotional
Journal*



Welcome!

This devotional journal includes meditations on *EM's Healthy Service Principles*, daily 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 Others Above Yourselfes

“We release the desire to make this experience about ourselves.”

The first of EM's Healthy Service Principles is about choosing to approach each opportunity for service and community involvement with open hands, letting go of our expectations (both intentional and unintentional) about what we think will happen. This includes everything from our desire to accomplish big things to our hope for how each personal interaction will play out. This is an act of humility that removes ourselves from the center of the story and allows our eyes to be open to all the unexpected ways God will move in and around us.

There was a lot of focus on you and your group as you prepared for this trip. Now that you are here, you enter the stories of others, shifting your focus to the people in this community. Read the following 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 places you go 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

How are the opinions or expectations of others outside of this trip influencing your expectations for this experience? Can you tune them out to focus on the people in front of you instead?

What would it look like if everyone “looked to the interests of others” during this trip?

Why is grumbling and complaining a sign you're making this experience about yourself? Who is the real “main character” of this experience if it's not about you?



2 Humbly in Love

“We remember we are visitors and guests, not consumers and tourists.”

When we travel anywhere to serve others, we enter an established community of people as visitors and, hopefully, as welcome guests. For this reason, we show respect for our hosts by adapting to a community's overall function, pace of life, orientation to time, and way of doing things, rather than expecting the community to bend to what makes us comfortable. We show up eager to listen and learn from hosts, partner ministries, and local community members, instead of asserting our own agenda or insisting on being the loudest voices in the room.

This will come with a level of discomfort that we can either choose to reject or embrace. But if we embrace it, we will begin to see the difference in cultures as beautiful, and that, even though something may be different, it is no less valuable. We will honor our differences, learn from them, and value the incredible God-breathed diversity of our world.

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

You are free to do whatever you choose! How you might use the freedom given to you by God to love and serve others?

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?

If you're a follower of Jesus, the goal is to become like Him, doing the types of things we see Him do. How can you begin to follow Jesus' example of giving your life away to others?



3 Every Desire for Goodness

“We view this experience as a privilege, not a purchase.”

The fact is, it is a rare thing to be able to afford to take time off from our lives, travel to a new place, and serve in someone else's community. In order to fully appreciate this privilege we carry, it's important that we choose not to view this experience as *transactional*—to be consumed or checked off of our bucket list—but instead as an incredible **opportunity** to learn, serve and grow while giving our time, attention, and resources to the work and ministry of local community partners.

Consider how your personal desires and will may have invaded your expectations for this service experience. Read the scriptures below and ask God, “*What is Your will for me 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

If we're honest, your team is here this week because you made plans, raised funds, signed documents and followed a checklist! Well done! But now what? What does it look like to shift from busy preparation to being present in this place with these people?

Think about your time so far. Where have you found an unexpected moment to listen, serve or learn? Where have your expectations been upended in positive ways?



4 For God So Loved

“We prioritize people over projects.”

People are the most important part of every service experience. Today, we remind ourselves that every person we encounter is our equal, living a life just as complex as our own—with hopes, dreams, giftings, mistakes, ambitions, sorrows, value, worth, and dignity.

We take time to be thoughtful about those we are serving and acknowledge our tendency to push people aside in order to be problem solvers. We choose to be curious and ask questions when we don't understand, resisting the urge to make a judgment and forge ahead on our own. Genuine human interaction will be our priority over the completion of a project or the expression of our own ideas.

Read the scriptures below and 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 might engage with you during their time serving?

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 people-first mentality?



5 Gifts From Above

“We trust God is already present.”

It may be obvious by now, but God has been present in this community long before you arrived. Because of this reality, we acknowledge that we do not “bring God” anywhere. Rather, we come with open hearts, to see, experience, and participate in the beautiful ways God is and has always been present.

We also remember that many communities have experienced historical trauma caused by Christian missionaries (with good or bad intentions) in the past. Because of this, we trust the ongoing work of God and engage expressions of faith different from our own with respect and wonder, as opposed to judgment and correction. We tread sensitively when sharing our opinions about theology, social issues or life in general, trusting that God is working in ways we may not always see clearly or understand.

Read the scriptures below and consider the ways that God has already been present in this community.

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.”

James 4:11-12

“Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?”

James 5:7-8

“Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.”

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?

Can you see ways that the local leaders are “waiting for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for rains”?

How does reflecting on the slow work of God in this community change your posture and approach to serving here?



6 Not Hidden from You

“We recognize and honor the image of God in everyone we meet.”

We cherish the richness and diversity present in all of humanity, each of us bearing the “Imago Dei” (image of God) given to us by our creator. This compels us to see all people as God does—with compassion, empathy, and love—and makes it impossible to write people off, look the other way, or ignore injustice present in their lives.

Let the truth of God’s love for all people in all places work in your heart and cause you to seriously consider what it looks like to bring the Kingdom of God from heaven to earth.

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.”

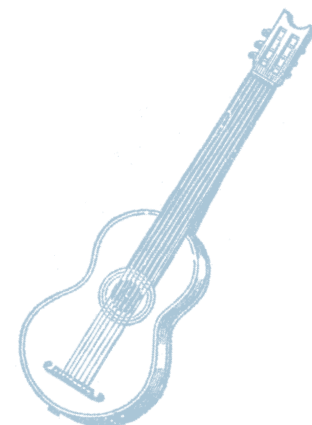
Romans 13:8-10

“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 are hard! It can be difficult to “love your neighbor as yourself” in every circumstance we find ourselves in. What have been the challenges 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 Equal Footing

“We resist the temptation to tell simple stories.”

As humans, 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.

By being transparent with the struggles present in all of us, we acknowledge no one is “better” or “worse”, but rather we are all on an equal footing with each other. 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.

Read the scripture passage below and remember that the stories we tell ourselves should be filled with wisdom of God, which is peace-loving, considerate, and full of mercy.

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

When you return home and share stories about this community, you will have influence over how it’s viewed by those who haven’t been here. What is a “simple story” that you might be tempted to tell about this community?

Consider, what is the **most generous interpretation** of the things you have witnessed and experienced here? How can you tell a story full of mercy and grace?

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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