

PRE/POST TRIP RESOURCES

This faith-forming experience has intentionally emphasized the following values for your students to continue focusing on after returning home to further develop faith for life:

- The Gospel Message
- Worship
- God's Word
- Seeing a Broken World in Need
- Serving Others
- Intergenerational Relationships

Coming home from something like this can be a spiritual high, or it can be a bit disorienting. Students will have experienced much, seen much and shared much together, so coming back to real life can be a letdown.

That is why follow-up is essential. It is simply not enough to get them ready to go, raise the funds and then have a wonderful experience. Your job as a youth leader isn't finished until the follow-up is complete.

With the right planning, you can enlist the church and the adults who supported the trip to participate in the follow-up as well. You can equip them with the post-trip questions so they can help students process their experience and integrate what they've learned into their daily life.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE FOR YOUR TRIP:

Equip your church to be Sending Partners and Follow-Up Partners. Almost every youth group going on a trip asks that adults support them with prayer and finances. Prepare an announcement or bulletin insert for while you're gone that will prepare the adults in the church for post-trip follow-up.

Ask your pastor, or whoever can represent you while you're gone, to make an announcement. You might use words like: "As a church, we've made a commitment to pray for and encourage the students who are gone. Let's ask God to increase their level of thankfulness, generosity, prayer and passion for missions. Let's ask that God would grant them each an understanding of their personal strengths and gifts as well as the ability to deal with issues in their own walk with Christ.

"When these students get back, let's not ask them: 'How was your trip? Did you have fun?' or 'What did you do?' Instead, try questions like: 'What is something you will miss from your trip? What did this experience make you more thankful for? Whom did you serve, and what impact did they have on you? What is your best memory of the trip? What is one thing God did in your life this week? What was the funniest situation? Who is going to help keep you accountable for your continued growth?'"

You can even consider putting a list of suggested questions in the bulletin on Sunday morning to give people ideas of constructive questions to ask the students.

DEBRIEFING ON THE WAY HOME:

As an adult leader, you have a great opportunity to find out what the students are thinking and how they feel about the experience and their lives after the experience.

After a trip like this, it's good to ask, "What's next?"

The first step is to understand what you think and how you feel about this experience, focusing on the people you learned from, those you served with and the principles God taught you. Hopefully, you learned a lot about yourself and understand better how God is working. A good post-trip plan will include:

- Debriefing: what I think and how I feel about what just happened
- Follow-up: what I need to focus on for the next 21 days to continue what is happening
- Follow-through: what character traits do I want to keep so that this trip becomes a significant part of my life journey

In order to take what you've learned and work it into your everyday life, you'll have to share those thoughts with people at home and stay connected to your church. This short trip will become a great part of your life journey if you keep working on what you've learned.

By the time you get home, you'll want to be ready to share one story about how the week impacted your life. When people at home ask, "What did you do?" they often really mean, "Whom did you serve, and how did the week impact your life?" Be ready to answer those questions. Here are a few other questions to answer with your team.

You can actually write these down and cut the phrases apart. On the way home, you can put them in a hat and ask a student to grab a piece of paper and answer the question to open up the discussion.

- **What are the top three things I will miss from my experience?**
- **What are the top three things I'm most thankful for at home?**
- **What is one thing I have to remember?**
- **What did God communicate to me?**
- **What was the funniest situation?**
- **Who will I share with when I get home so I can be held accountable for continuing this growth?**

10 ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS TO HAVE ANSWERS FOR:

1. Who helped send you on this trip, and how will you share with them the impact the experience has had on you? Specifically remember that there were:

- People praying for you.
- People who gave money toward your trip.
- People who took care of your responsibilities while you were gone.

These people are called "Sending Supporters," and they will want to hear about the impact of the trip on your life and on the lives of the people you served. They might ask you, "What did you do?" But what they really want you to answer is, "How did this trip touch your life and the lives of the people you served?"

2. What did you learn from the people in the community this week?
3. What surprised you this week? What disappointed you? How did that impact your week?
4. Who/what do you specifically want to pray for when you get home?
5. When you think of this trip, what is one specific snapshot that comes to mind?
6. How do you want your youth group to be involved in service and justice at home?
7. When you think about going home, what are you anxious about? What are you excited about?
8. What do you hope will change about your life as a result of this experience? Who can help you make those changes or hold you accountable for them?
9. How could/should your church change as a result of your team's experience?
10. How are you going to talk with others about this experience? If you were going to share a sixty-second version of this week, what would you say?

NOTE: Some of these questions are adapted from Kara Powell and Brad Griffin, *Deep Justice Journeys: 50 Activities to Move from Mission Trips to Missional Living* (Grand Rapids: YS/Zondervan, 2009).

FOLLOW UP – YOUR FIRST 21 DAYS:

1. Stay Connected with People:

It can be difficult to return from a trip and say goodbye to teammates who understand exactly what you are talking about in regards to the experience. Don't let this feeling take away your energy to apply all you learned to your everyday life. Service and discipleship belong in the everyday lives of Christ-followers.

2. Share with Your Sending Supporters:

Send a letter to anyone who helped you raise money for your trip and who prayed for you. Share about the people you served and what you learned. Ask them to keep praying for you through the next three weeks as you take what you've learned into your everyday life.

3. Have a Team Meeting:

Plan a follow-up meeting once you're home. Bring anything that might help you remember the commitments you made or what impacted you (e.g. a short note, a journal or a picture to remind yourself of a story or person).

Here are Some Things to Emphasize at Such a Meeting:

- Remembering what God has done. Focus on changed lives and not merely on the tasks accomplished. How did the work actually help the Host Church and the people/organizations receiving the work?
- What are you thankful for now that you're home?
- Praying for your team, those that hosted you and those you worked with/for.
- Sharing photos that were taken by different people on the trip.
- Journaling. If you kept a journal, refer to it so you remember all you did and learned. You could even share some of your entries in an email to your teammates and encourage them to share what they learned on the trip as well. Keep journaling.

4. Plan Some Next Steps as a Group:

- Continue to pray for those people who impacted your life: hosts, community members or church members.
- Create future goals based on what you learned about yourself and ask a leader or a friend to keep you accountable.
- Determine how to use your specific skills/gifts to serve in your church and community.
- Decide how you will increase prayer in your church for the community.
- Look for specific ministry opportunities similar to those you were involved with. Are there similar opportunities you can be involved with at home? Don't just assume that there is or isn't; do some research. If not, can your church start something to meet the need in your community?

5. Plan Some Next Steps Individually:

- What situation in my home life do I need to give up to God? Were things revealed during my trip that I can act on now?
- How can this experience enhance my service at church?
- What did I learn about the spiritual gifts I have been given, and how can I put these into action at home?
- What spiritual commitments or goals do I want to set for myself in the next month? In the next year?
- How will I do some research on local needs that I can help to meet?
- Remember: if you are setting goals, ask God for direction and for wisdom. Don't set goals first and then ask him to bless them later. Goals should be **SMART**:
Specific • Measurable • Attainable • Realistic • Timely

IF YOU/YOUR GROUP IS GOING TO CONSIDER ANOTHER EXPERIENCE LIKE THIS:

Evaluate the Specific Experience:

- Are you interested in doing something similar again next year?
- What fundraisers, in addition to those done this year, would you suggest?
- List anything you would change.

Pre/Post-Trip Teaching Lessons

PRE-TRIP LESSON: GOOD SURPRISES

Scripture text: Luke 11:5-13

Lesson Outline

Surprises can be silly, scary or sarcastic! Consider using an example from a show like Fear Factor where in one challenge participants put their hands in a box filled with gross things.

1. Worst Surprise Ever

- Using Luke 11:11-12, convey that a bad surprise would be getting a snake when you expected a fish dinner.
- It is hard to imagine a father who would actually do this. If they did, we would call that abuse.

2. Even if You're Evil

- We have a natural bent to hate God and hate our neighbour (Heidelberg Catechism Q and A 5).
- Even in our natural hateful state, we know how to give good gifts.

3. God's Pleasant Surprises

- How much more than will your Heavenly Father give to those who ask him?
- God's surprises are pleasant, not scary.
- Through these pleasant surprises, we see God's care for us and his desire to transform us from the inside out to live for him.

4. Our Response

- Surprises are still shocking, being pleasant doesn't take the shock away.
 - Biblical examples could be Abraham being told he would have a son at 100 years old or Mary being told she would give birth to the Messiah.
- Knowing God's surprises are pleasant should put us in a state of eager anticipation of what God will do.
- We submit to his will and respond with open and ready hands and hearts to serve him when he calls us.

In a youth group setting, you can include a game like the one from Fear Factor. Use a cardboard box and cut holes in the side. Ask participants to stick their hands in and guess what is inside based on touch. Include both gross and pleasant things, and then take it home with the above outline.

3. *Author Unknown, Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 5 (Heidelberg, 1563).*

NOTES



Lined area for writing notes.

POST-TRIP LESSON: KEEP THE SURPRISES COMING

Scripture Text: Ephesians 3:14-21

Lesson Outline

Consider using an example to set up the surprise pairing of Jews and Gentiles we find in Ephesians. You can use Shakespearean literature with the houses in Romeo and Juliet, or a sports reference like the Red Sox and Yankees, or the Lakers and Celtics

1. Surprise Church

- The church in Ephesus had both Jews and Gentiles, two groups you wouldn't picture getting along, especially the Jews accepting the Gentiles into the covenant promises of God.
- Paul is preaching unity throughout the first half of this letter.

2. Marvelous Plans

- Paul can barely contain his excitement about this church and their dynamics.
- God had a plan for ALL his people from the beginning to bring them to himself, and Paul is seeing this fulfilled in the church in Ephesus.

3. Keep Praying

- Constant prayer and thanksgiving is Paul's response to this church.
- This should be our response after we have witnessed God surprising us.
- When Christ's love is on full display, we should rejoice.

4. Expect and Hope for More

- And just when you think Paul is done praising God for this wonderful church, he says to expect more surprises.
- God's work doesn't stop; he continues to work in and through us by the Spirit.
- He is going to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.
- Keep the surprises coming, God! We are ready!

For a youth group setting, consider games that force participants to work together, like a three-legged race. You could also do fun snacks like cupcakes with trick candles that don't go out because the surprises just keep on coming. You can use the outline for teaching.

