



Introduction

(Excerpt from *Ready-to-Go Devotions for Mission and Service*)

As Christians, we're called to go and make disciples. As youth workers, we often answer that call through mission trips and work projects. We load our students into minivans or tour buses or airplanes. We haul them to nearby cities or distant states or countries halfway around the globe. We spend a day feeding the homeless, a weekend repairing houses, or a week running a Bible school. We apply Band-Aids and soothe tempers and treat homesickness with hugs.

And then we come home.

What have we accomplished? Perhaps we've helped a homeless man survive another day. Perhaps we've given an elderly woman a roof that doesn't leak. Perhaps we've told a child about Jesus for the very first time.

That's all great stuff (Great Commission stuff, in fact), but what about our students? Have they been changed by the experience? Have they received as much love as they've given? Have they become the disciples you set out to make?

High horses and high rollers

As I've participated in youth mission trips over the years, I've noticed a couple of phenomena. Some students (and many adults as well) have a knights-in-shining-armor attitude. They swoop into the mission field on their noble steeds, do some good work, and gallop off into the sunset. Their armor shields them from the people they're serving and keeps the Holy Spirit from entering their hearts.

And then there's the Vegas attitude—you know, what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. Many students are happy to go without showers for a couple of days and love on little kids and even shed a few tears, but once they get back home, back to "reality," they revert to their pre-trip self-absorbed selves.

We're as much to blame as they are. If we don't get our students out of their tunic, we've missed an opportunity. If they don't bring home more than just dirty laundry, we've failed to fully live out the Great Commission.

Capturing the moments

We can't script life-changing moments, of course. We can't decide that on Tuesday at 1:17 p.m.—right between lunch and our afternoon work project—our students will finally “get it.” The Holy Spirit just doesn't stick to human schedules.

But we don't need to create those moments anyway. We just need to capture them when they happen. We need to build into our mission trips and service projects opportunities for students (and chaperones) to reflect on what they're experiencing.

That's the point of this book. In the following pages, you'll find dozens of daily devotions that relate to specific issues: spiritual baggage, language barriers, host families, schedule changes, homesickness, dealing with people who are different, lack of sleep, etc. Each devotion ties together three elements: Scripture, the mission/service experience, and life back home. Students are challenged not just to read the devotions but also to respond to them through writing, reflection, and prayer. By working through the devotions, students should be able to process their experiences and start their days better equipped for service. They should also learn some important lessons they can take home along with their snapshots, sunburns, and smelly laundry.

Most mission trips and work projects are whirlwinds of activity, but—as 1 Kings 19:11-12 reminds us—God is not always in the whirlwind. Sometimes we need to slow down and listen for God's still, small voice. My prayer is that these devotions help you and your students do just that.

Now, go and make disciples!