

Mission Diary:

A Devotional and
Journal for Your
Mission Trip



Mission Diary: A Devotional and Journal for Your Mission Trip

**by Krin Van Tatenhove
and Rob Mueller**

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*Dedicated to those who partner with God's children around the world to
promote justice, love, and mutual transformation*

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Krin Van Tatenhove: pages 3, 7, 19, 27, 32, 35, 40, 43, 49, 57, 60, 75
Rob Mueller: pages 65, 68



I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. – Jesus of Nazareth

INTRODUCTION

“Mission in partnership is a transformational adventure...there is no way to guarantee what will happen along the way to God’s future.” - Sherron George

When I let my mind roam, I see a montage of faces and places around the world. People smiling, side by side, engaged in prayer, worship, work, and cross-cultural understanding. These memories make me a wealthy soul, and they highlight a timeless axiom: *mission changes lives*.

If you are holding this diary in your hands, you are on a mission trip that will transform you forever. This is true whether it’s your first adventure or one of many. We want you to plumb the depths of your voyage, so we humbly offer these devotions. They center on a concept that is the guiding light of authentic mission enterprises: *partnership*.

True partnership *always* changes us, shaping our characters, spirits, and actions. If we don’t experience this ongoing change, we have an acquaintance or sterile contract, not a partnership. We miss the fullness of what God intends for us. Mutual transformation is the hallmark of fruitful collaboration in a marriage, a student/teacher relationship, a corporate merger, or mission work.

As a Christian denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA) uses the term “mission co-worker,” replacing the old title “missionary.” The reason is simple and profound. Historically, missionary work often reflected a toxic, paternalistic attitude. Westerners supposedly held the truth, the expertise, the power and money, while the “recipients” of their focus were relegated to inferior roles in the partnership.

Thankfully this notion is dying, especially in progressive Christian circles. Truly, we are co-workers in God’s kingdom. We

all have much to learn from each other, and the give and take of this adventure is at the heart of what it means to follow Christ.

Sherron George, former mission co-worker, wrote a book entitled *Called as Partners in Christ's Service: The Practice of God's Mission*. She focuses on the art of partnership, those qualities of heart, mind, and spirit that transform us. We use her best practices as the basis for every devotion in this booklet.

- **Respect:** valuing the “otherness” of your partner’s identity as having equal dignity and worth; expecting there to be differences but staying committed to understanding rather than judgment.
- **Compassion:** the ability to feel the suffering of others, to climb inside their reality long enough to experience it with them, not to fix it, but to *feel* it.
- **Humility:** learning to recognize the limits of our understanding and perspective, opening ourselves to the unique wisdom that comes from our partner’s position in life.
- **Observing and Participating:** balancing our *doing* with *being*. Typically, those who initiate local mission efforts perceive themselves as having the answers and capacity to implement predetermined solutions. *Listening without doing* is essential to the cultivation of trust and respect. When the time comes for action, it happens with deeper awareness and investment.
- **Receiving and Giving:** embodying *both* these qualities with authenticity. Far too much mission work is a one-way transfer of resources and talent from the “haves” to the “have nots,” a one-sided dynamic that destroys real relationships. It objectifies both the giver and the receiver into one-dimensional caricatures that impoverish us all.

We strongly urge you to maintain individual and group devotion times throughout your trip, no matter how busy you get. We pray that you will be open and honest with your team. Vulnerability with others stirs the Spirit and binds us together.

We follow a daily pattern for these shared moments: 1) an initial prayer, 2) an opening question, 3) a reading from scripture, 4) a *lectio divina* style listening, 5) the devotion itself, 6) reflection questions based on the devotion, 7) a closing prayer. The last page of the journal provides space for you to record details of your trip, including the names/signatures of your team members.

Rob Mueller and I have dedicated much of our lives to sharing the Good News of God's love. Without a doubt, we have received far more than we have given. We pray that you will yield yourself to what God wants to teach you during this mission trip. Let the Spirit pour out abundant gifts upon you and transform you further into the image of Jesus.

I close with a story that will always fill my heart with gratitude.

On a mission trip to Mexico, I joined a local pastor, his wife, and their four children for lunch. Their home was little more than a shanty, no water or electricity, situated along the Colorado River canal, its water highly polluted from northern industrial waste.

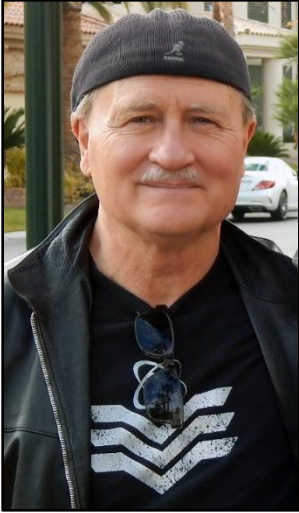
The older boys in the family asked me to swim with them. Gulp! I agreed reluctantly, but carefully kept my lips sealed. Afterwards, as I scrambled up the concrete embankment, I realized I had drifted. My sandals were far away. Suddenly I felt a tap on my leg. I looked down to find my fellow pastor kneeling in the dirt, a towel and my sandals in his hands. He began to dry my feet. I resisted at first, but then I let him continue.

I will never forget the feel of his touch, the love in his smile, or our arms around each other's shoulders as we walked from that

place. On your own mission trip, you will experience the blessing of this Christ-like partnership. It is like meeting Jesus on the road to Emmaus. *Vaya con Dios!* – *Krin Van Tatenhove*



CONTRIBUTORS



Krin Van Tatenhove grew up in the Los Angeles area, but has lived all over the country: Nevada, New Mexico, South Carolina, and now Texas. He has been an ordained Presbyterian pastor for 31 years, with simultaneous experience as a hospice chaplain, director of projects for Habitat for Humanity, substance abuse counselor in both Nevada and Texas, writer for newspapers and magazines. He is the author of numerous books, and co-author of *Neighborhood Church: Transforming Your Congregation into a*

Powerhouse for Mission. Krin has been a leader and participant on many domestic and international mission trips. In 2003, he founded the nonprofit Torch of Faith, which currently strives to create understanding between people of diverse faith traditions. You can read about this at www.torchoffaith.com. Krin and his wife, Donna, have a blended family with four children.



Rob Mueller has been the pastor of Divine Redeemer Presbyterian Church a bilingual inner-city congregation in San Antonio, Texas for 24 years. Prior to that he was the founder and director of Christian Base-Community Ministry, an ecumenical office that fostered and supported the development of small house-church styled communities of reflection and neighborhood action,

largely within the Roman Catholic community of San Antonio. Rob was a founding member of Mission Presbytery's Guatemala Partnership which is now over 15 years old. He has led dozens of mission trips, both at home and abroad. Rob is co-author of *Neighborhood Church: Transforming Your Congregation into a Powerhouse for Mission*. He and his wife, Beth Watson, have a blended family with six adult children.

How to use this devotional and journal

1. As we mention in the introduction, be intentional about making time and space for your group to meet twice daily. This is especially true when you are tired or your schedule has changed. Those occasions often turn out to be the most powerful spiritual moments.
2. Have a covenant as a group that you will value each person's thoughts and words equally. People have different comfort levels when speaking in a group context. Daily leaders, empowered by the group's covenant, will make sure that each participant is given ample time and space to share.
3. You will find blank pages where we encourage you to journal on a daily basis. Even if this spiritual discipline is new to you, please give it a chance.
4. Finally, make a pledge to open your eyes, ears, and heart to this process. Your own vulnerability in sharing with your group will go a long way in stirring the Spirit in your midst.

DAY ONE: EVENING OF ARRIVAL

Evening prayer: Thank you, God, for bringing us to our destination this week. Settle our hearts and minds from the busyness of the road so that we can be present to you and each other. Amen.

Opening question: What are your expectations for this week?

Scripture reading: Have a member of the group slowly read this text aloud twice as the other members listen with eyes closed.

Romans 8:28-29

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.

Listening: What word or phrase from this passage resonates with you or grabs your attention? (Allow time for any group members who would like to share their thoughts).

Devotion: There is danger in “proof texting,” choosing to quote Bible verses out of context to prove a point or justify our side of an argument. For many years, I used Romans 8:28 in exactly that way. When people were facing hardship, struggling to overcome obstacles, I would remind them that, “...all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” In short, “Don’t worry. God has your back and everything will turn out fine!”

I posted this verse as a meme on social media. I inscribed it on my first iPod and featured it at the bottom of my business cards. I called it my “life verse.”

There was only one problem. I didn’t understand the fullness of these words in their original context. I didn’t completely realize

what Paul meant by “good.” All I had to do was read the next verse: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...”

Paul is saying that God’s ultimate purpose for our lives is to be shaped into the image of Jesus Christ, to pattern our existence upon his model of prophetic passion, mercy, and forgiveness.

Obviously, this isn’t easy. It requires great mindfulness and humility. It may call for repentance and a shedding of soul-skins that feels painful in the moment. But the result is a life filled with more of the Spirit, a freeing mixture of love, peace, and joy.

Right now, even though you are tired from your travels, you have a sense of anticipation about the days that lie ahead on your mission. There will be many new experiences. Your horizons will broaden through interpersonal challenges with your team, adjustments to foreign ways, and other issues that will test your patience and love. It might not all seem positive in the moment.

Here is something I wholeheartedly believe. If you open yourself to everything God has to teach you on this trip, you will be shaped further into the image of Christ. In the end, this is the greatest gift of all. - *KVT*

Reflection question:

1) Can you recall a time when a person or event defied your expectations and things turned out better than you dreamed?

Closing prayer: Loving God, we know that your vision for goodness in our lives exceeds our greatest imaginings. Give us teachable hearts and minds for what lies ahead. Amen.

My Journal

My Journal

DAY TWO: RESPECT

Introduction: valuing the “otherness” of your partner’s identity as having equal dignity and worth; expecting there to be differences but staying committed to understanding rather than judgment.

MORNING: THE IMAGE OF GOD

Morning prayer: Creator of All, your image shines in the eyes of every being. Give us the openness of heart to encounter you and to bow in reverence before the wonder of your presence in one another. Amen.

Opening question: Share a time when you experienced the gift of a “holy friendship”—a relationship that was so meaningful you now see it as sacred.

Scripture reading: Have a member of the group slowly read this text aloud twice as the other members listen with eyes closed.

Genesis 1:26-31

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall

have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Listening: What word or phrase from this passage resonates with you or grabs your attention? (Allow time for any group members who would like to share their thoughts).

Devotion: In the Celtic Christian tradition, this text is claimed as a powerful affirmation of “original goodness.” Other theologians refer to it as “original righteousness.” Both descriptions affirm that the first word spoken over our lives is one of blessing, not curse or judgment. We are good. This is our core identity because we flow from the creative energy of God’s own self. This image of God is planted deep within us and every other person, even those that, at first glance, seem very different from us.

During this week together, you will share your space and your life with others in ways that take you beyond your comfort zone. The intensity of being “stuck” with people whose personalities sometimes grate on yours, whose customs are foreign to you, whose perspectives on life seem odd—*all* of these experiences and more will tempt you to judge, dismiss, or reject someone who is made in the image of God just as you are.

When you feel judgmental voices rising within you, we invite you to SNAP—Stop, Notice, Attend, and Pivot. Stop the judgment. Notice what you are feeling, thinking, or saying to yourself in that moment. Attend (pay attention) to what triggered this emotional response—a previous experience of your own, a painful memory, a fear or aversion. Finally, Pivot to consider that this person provoking judgment in you is also made in God’s image. Remember what is

deepest, what is truest about them—that they too bear the imprint of God upon their life. By looking for this deeper truth instead of rushing to judgment, you will catch a glimpse of the Holy One. - *RM*

Reflection questions (choose one):

- 1) How does it feel to consider that the deepest truth about your life and nature is that you bear the *imago dei*, the imprint of God?
- 2) Share an experience of having been unfairly judged or rejected by someone in your life? How did it feel then? How does it feel now to remember it?
- 3) When have you discovered common ground with someone you initially perceived to be so different that you couldn't accept them?

Closing prayer: Spirit of God, grant us the grace to recognize when we rush to judgment instead of straining to discover the gift of your presence in those we find different from ourselves. Amen.

We are good. This is our core identity because we flow from the creative energy of God's own self. This image of God is planted deep within us and every other person, even those that, at first glance, seem very different from us.

EVENING: WILLINGNESS TO LEARN

Evening prayer: Ever Present God, be among us this evening as we reflect upon our day. Open our hearts to what we can learn from each other. Amen.

Debriefing question: During this day, when you were tempted to judge someone else, were you able to SNAP and look for evidence of God's presence? When were you surprised by the grace of God's presence in a teammate or new acquaintance?

Scripture reading: Have a member of the group slowly read this text aloud twice as the other members listen with eyes closed.

Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Listening: What word or phrase from this passage resonates with you or grabs your attention? (Allow time for any group members who would like to share their thoughts).

Devotion: I grew up with an image of Jesus that didn't allow for his development or transformation as a growing human being. I

imagined that he always knew everything and didn't have to struggle for understanding. I now see him differently, and this passage is one of the reasons why. Jesus, it seems, had a pretty clear idea of who he was "supposed" to serve with his mission and who fell outside those boundaries. Canaanite women, it appears, were NOT part of his vision.

And then this remarkable encounter occurs. The woman approaches Jesus out of her need, even though Jesus is a Jew of a different culture and religion. She risks the encounter. She risks the rejection. Her request is rebuffed with a proverb that equates her and her daughter with dogs. This had to be humiliating, but she persisted. "Even the dogs deserve the crumbs," she responds, and in that instant, Jesus *sees her*. He discovers that saving faith is not simply the purview of the Jews, but resides in "others" as well and grants her request. Jesus allows himself to be taught by this woman and her faith.

As you engage this week's experience of mission, you will encounter people who are perhaps of a different religious tradition, a different culture or ethnicity, or a different social class. Your prejudices will rise up, blinding you to what you can learn from them. But if your heart is open, you can also be taught by them. You can learn things that your own life's context might never have helped you see. - *RM*

Reflection questions (choose one):

- 1) Many of us grow up thinking and believing that other people look at the world the same way we do. Can you think of a time when you were startled to discover that this is not true?
- 2) Describe an important personal encounter with someone of a different culture, race, class or religion, and how it changed you.
- 3) Did you learn something unexpected today? Tell us about it.

Closing prayer: God of Life, may we seek first to understand before being understood. Give us teachable spirits so that we may learn from each other even as Jesus was willing to learn. Amen.



Be willing to be a beginner every single morning.

— Meister Eckhart

My Journal

My Journal

DAY THREE: COMPASSION

Introduction: valuing the “otherness” of your partner’s identity as having equal dignity and worth; expecting there to be differences but staying committed to understanding rather than judgment.

MORNING: THE COMPASSION OF GOD

Morning prayer: Merciful Maker, open our spirits this day to a deeper experience of compassion. Peel away our prejudice so that we can feel another’s life the way that you do. Amen.

Opening question: Reflect upon a time when you needed forgiveness from another person. What had you done? What words of consolation or pardon did you long for? Did you receive them?

Scripture reading: Have a member of the group slowly read this text aloud twice as the other members listen with eyes closed.

Psalm 103:6-14

*The LORD works vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.
The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.
For he knows how we were made;
he remembers that we are dust.*

Listening: What word or phrase from this passage resonates with you or grabs your attention? (Allow time for any group members who would like to share their thoughts).

Devotion: I grew up as the oldest of two children. When I was a teenager, my father and I got into a heated argument over some issue I can't even remember. I do recall that I felt misunderstood in a way that seemed unjustified and ridiculous. I expressed my exasperation toward my father in words that were not kind or helpful. And then, in a moment that changed my perception of him forever, he looked at me with a sense of desperation and said, "Robert, cut me some slack here! I have never been a parent before! I am just trying to do my best and figure this out as I go along!"

I was stunned. It had never occurred to me that my dad felt insecure and uncertain about being a parent. I had never considered that he might feel clueless and challenged by the job of guiding my young life. This moment of vulnerability opened a space in my heart to forgive what I perceived to be a failure in judgment and to acknowledge that my father (like me) was capable of making mistakes. My hardline stance softened. I was able to feel his insecurity, even identify with it.

Compassion means the ability to "feel with another." These verses from Psalm 103 articulate how God is compassionate toward us, how God feels our experience and responds with generosity and steadfast love. On this mission trip, you will encounter a lot of feelings in others; some you will share, others you will not. The challenge to feel with another person may come with a person from the community you are serving, or with another companion from your group. To live compassionately means to set ourselves aside long enough to be able to feel what that other person is feeling.

In the prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, we are invited to seek understanding before seeking to be understood. Make this a personal goal in the days ahead. - *RM*

Reflection questions (choose one):

- 1) Share an experience of having felt misunderstood by another person?
- 2) Why do you think we more often insist that others understand *us* instead of seeking first to understand *them*?
- 3) In your opinion, what is the most important task in seeking to understand another person's point of view?

Closing prayer:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

EVENING: COMPASSIONATE ACTION

Evening prayer: Risk Taking God, as we step beyond our comfort zones in service, give us the grace to trust that you will be with us. Amen.

Debriefing question: What was the most meaningful thing you did this day? Did you have a chance to “feel” with another person?

Scripture reading: Have a member of the group slowly read this text aloud twice as the other members listen with eyes closed.

Luke 10:25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Listening: What word or phrase from this passage resonates with you or grabs your attention? (Allow time for any group members who would like to share their thoughts).

Devotion: “The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of beauty is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, but indifference between life and death.” - Elie Wiesel

Elie Wiesel, a survivor of the Holocaust, said that the most painful thing for many Jews during the horrors of Nazi occupation and genocide was the indifference of many “good” people in the face of those atrocities. Jesus calls attention to the same human tendency to justify our avoidance of another’s suffering. The lawyer who approaches Jesus asks what is required to enjoy eternal life, and Jesus condenses the law into two great commandments: Love God and Love Neighbor. Then the conversation shifts as the lawyer wants to know how Jesus defines “neighbor.” Who, exactly, is he responsible for? But with his parable of the Samaritan traveler, Jesus flips the question from “Who is my neighbor?” to “Who *acted* like a neighbor?”—a vital distinction.

When we are preoccupied with trying to define which neighbors are worthy of our attention and which are not, we justify our indifference just like the Levite and priest in this parable. Instead, when we ask ourselves the question, “Did I act as a neighbor?” the onus is upon us to examine our own behavior and nothing else. Jesus reminds us that to live compassionately we must be willing to enter into the suffering of others—feeling what they feel—and then respond by giving what we can in love.

One of the gifts that mission trips offer is an increased sensitivity to the pain and struggle of another community of people. But this entry into their reality is not meant to provoke guilt; it is an

invitation to *action*. Compassionate action is the objective Jesus points to for his disciples, both past and present. - *RM*

Reflection questions (choose one):

- 1) When have you experienced another person treat your personal suffering with indifference?
- 2) When have you been moved to act with compassion for another person's suffering?
- 3) Why do you think Jesus refuses to answer the question, "Who is my neighbor?", choosing instead to focus on whether or not we acted as a neighbor?

Closing prayer: God of Compassion, forgive us for the ways we try to justify our indifference to the suffering of others. Give us the heart of Jesus, so that we may learn to live and act compassionately. Amen.



My Journal

My Journal

DAY FOUR: HUMILITY

Introduction: learning to recognize the limits of our understanding and perspective, opening ourselves to the unique wisdom that comes from our partner's position in life.

MORNING: THE MIND OF CHRIST

Morning prayer: Loving God, help us realize more fully what it means to have the “mind of Christ” as we travel further with each other on this path of partnership. Amen.

Opening question: Share a memory of a time when you were humbled. How did it make you feel?

Scripture Reading: Have a member of the group slowly read this text aloud twice as the other members listen with eyes closed.

Philippians 2:1-8

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

*who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,*

*he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.*

Listening: What word or phrase from this passage resonates with you or grabs your attention? (Allow time for any group members who would like to share their thoughts).

Devotion: Many people condense the Christian message into one word: *love*. Jesus took this human quality beyond sentimentality into the realm of action, even calling us to love our enemies, perhaps his most difficult command.

But there's another word that summarizes Jesus's teachings and way of life: *humility*. Our English word comes from the Latin *humus*, meaning earth, echoing the phrase we repeat at Ash Wednesday services, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you will return." We experience humility when we are least aware of it. It stems from self-forgetting, and we often find it as we lose ourselves in the act of serving others.

Our passage from Philippians comes from a section called "Imitating Christ's Humility." Scholars believe it is an early hymn shared by the first century church, its tune lost to antiquity. After pleading with us to "regard others as better than yourselves," Paul calls us to develop the "mind of Christ," who "did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself..."

This is the eternal pattern of our faith. Emptying ourselves of the need to be right and the need to be in control. Emptying ourselves of any privilege we have inherited because of our skin color, class, or nationality, allowing us to hear the voices of those long silenced. Emptying ourselves through a recognition that we *all* come from dust and to dust we will return.

Mission trips often have a humbling effect. Sometimes it is because we encounter living conditions far harsher than those we take for granted. Sometimes it is because we see an abundance of hospitality and gratitude, qualities that may be lacking in our own lives or culture. No matter the source, humility helps us develop the mind of Christ. - *KVT*

Reflection questions (choose one):

- 1) Are you willing to admit to an area of pride in your life, something that can get in the way of your relationships with others?
- 2) What privilege have you inherited that may not be experienced by many people in our world?

Closing prayer: Holy Spirit, we know that as we open our lives to your presence, you will help us savor your fruit. Guide us today in our work and fellowship. Amen.



EVENING: THE PATH TO GREATNESS

Opening prayer: Servant God, as we gather in your name, help us hear the Spirit's voice speaking to us both individually and as a group. Amen.

Debriefing question: Share any experiences from today that have been especially meaningful to you. In particular, when were you aware of the need for more humility?

Scripture Reading: Have a member of the group slowly read this text aloud twice as the other members listen with eyes closed.

Matthew 20:20-28

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."

When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Listening: What word or phrase from this passage resonates with you or grabs your attention? (Allow time for any group members who would like to share their thoughts).

Devotion: It is a divine irony that one of America's greatest champions for Christ was a descendant of African slaves. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose family retained the last name of their former slave owners, revealed Jesus's power through a life that will forever influence world history. Here is one of his most celebrated quotes.

"Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's Theory of Relativity to serve... You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love."

Our scene in Matthew gets to the same meaning with an element of humor. The mother of James and John is lobbying for the future of her boys. She wants them to sit in seats of honor after Jesus inherits his eternal kingdom. When the other disciples catch wind of this, they are angry, and that is when Jesus clearly states a core principle of his mission: "The one who would be great among you must be your servant."

Too often, we interpret these words simply as a call to self-denial, even self-effacement. I think of them in a far different way. Jesus did not deny our inner desire for greatness. He just showed us how to achieve it through service. Service, like love, is a muscle that grows stronger as we exercise it. One of its primary side effects is the development of humility as we partner with others in bringing Christ's Kingdom to earth.

This is one of the greatest blessings of mission trips—the daily chance to take a posture of humble service, willing to listen, to yield, and to joyfully do whatever is required of us. - *KVT*

Reflection questions (choose one):

- 1) Like James, John, and their mother, we often jockey to be noticed, driven by our egos. Are you willing to share a memory from your own life that illustrates this?
- 2) Tell of a time when you considered it a great privilege to serve another person.
- 3) Was there a moment today when you humbly had the chance to serve someone else, expecting nothing in return? Tell us about it.

Closing prayer: Gracious God, thank you for partnering with us and for calling us to partner with others. As we serve, give us joy in the knowledge that we are uniting with Jesus and the central mission of his life. Amen.



My Journal

My Journal

DAY FIVE: OBSERVING

Introduction: balancing our *doing* with *being*. Typically, those who initiate local mission efforts perceive themselves as having the answers and capacity to implement predetermined solutions. *Listening without doing* is essential to the cultivation of trust and respect. When the time comes for action, it happens with deeper awareness and investment.

MORNING: CHOOSING WHAT WILL LAST

Morning prayer: Source of Life, center us during this time of devotion. Speak to us individually and as a group so that we can learn your timeless truths. Amen.

Opening question: When it comes to balancing work and play, how would you describe your life?

Scripture reading: Have a member of the group slowly read this text aloud twice as the other members listen with eyes closed.

Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Listening: What word or phrase from this passage resonates with you or grabs your attention? (Allow time for any group members who would like to share their thoughts).

Devotion: I once had a debate with a friend of mine. She and I had been on numerous international mission trips, and in one country I was put off by how our partners always seemed tardy. No matter what time we set for our work together, they arrived late.

“Krin,” said my friend, “you need to learn the difference between being ‘on time’ and ‘in time.’ Our friends will get here, but if a relationship or situation requires attention along the way, they will seize that opportunity and enjoy it.”

I chafed at that lesson, and to be honest, I still value punctuality as a personal habit. But when I am on mission trips, I try to be conscious of my acculturation. Our Western mindset teaches us to define ourselves in terms of our achievements and accomplishments. The old adage fits for many of us—we have become *human doings* rather than *human beings*. The casualties of this way of life are profound. Longshoreman philosopher Eric Hoffer wrote, “We are warned not to waste time, but we are brought up to waste our lives.”

In our familiar passage from Luke, we see Jesus in the home of his friends, Martha and Mary. There have been countless sermons preached on the contrast between these sisters—one who is busy and resentful, the other who reclines at Jesus’s feet and listens to his teachings. Many of us can empathize with Martha. After all, someone has to do the dirty work!

For our purposes this morning, let’s simply hear these words Jesus spoke about Mary: “There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” Today, slow down enough to listen and observe. Let the experience

of this day be a true source of wisdom, one that might remain with you forever. - *KVT*

Reflection questions (choose one):

- 1) What makes it hard for you to slow down and experience the present more fully?
- 2) Do you identify more with Mary or Martha? Why?

Closing prayer: O God, guide our work today so that we can savor the being as well as the doing. Amen.



EVENING: THE LOOK OF LOVE

Opening prayer: God of Abundance, as we settle into this time together, help us open our hearts and minds to both you and our companions. Amen.

Debriefing question: Share any experiences from this day that have been especially meaningful to you. In particular, share an observation that came from learning to slow down and experience the God-given details of this trip.

Scripture reading: Have a member of the group slowly read this text aloud twice as the other members listen with eyes closed.

Mark 10:17-22

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Listening: What word or phrase from this passage resonates with you or grabs your attention? (Allow time for any group members who would like to share their thoughts).

Devotion: Versions of this story occur in all the Synoptic Gospels. A rich young man, sometimes called a ruler, comes to Jesus for guidance. Despite the privilege and wealth of his life, something is

lacking. Think of the powerful irony here: this man seeks his “missing piece” from a poor itinerant carpenter. Truly, the Gospel from beginning to end overturns our view of the world!

This encounter seems relentlessly demanding. The young man has been an observant Jew since childhood, living out the laws of a spiritual life handed down through his tradition. But Jesus asks him to go further, to give up his wealth, a request so shocking that he literally begins to grieve. It is a story about letting go of the primary things that hold us back from the Kingdom of Heaven.

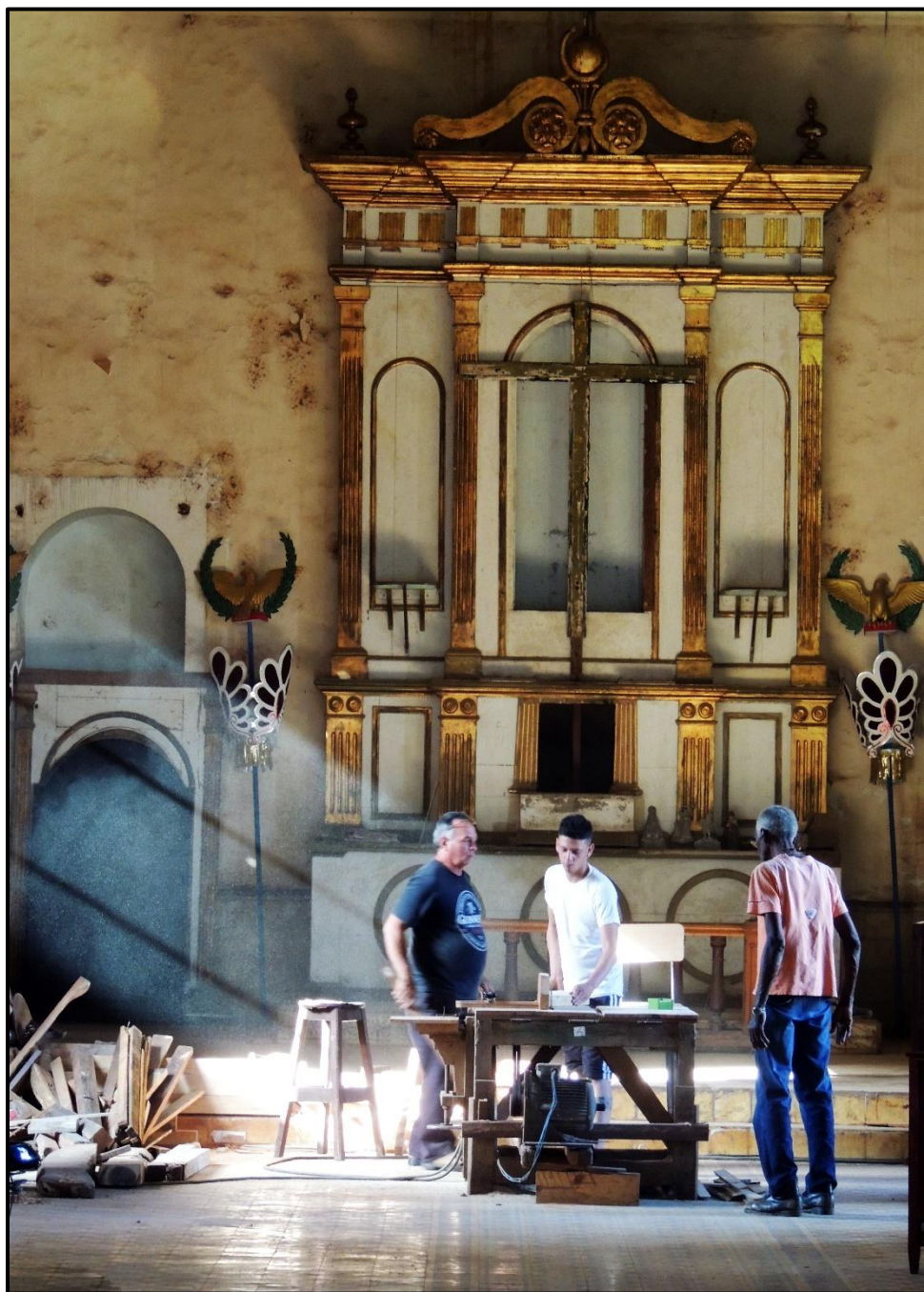
But I want to focus on just a few words found only here in Mark’s version: “Jesus, looking at him, loved him...” How beautiful! In that moment of the man’s need, Jesus saw him through the eyes of love. It reminds me of something God said to the prophet Samuel: “For the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

This is a key piece of our calling as we work to advance the vision of Christ: to see the world, especially the people God places in our paths, through the eyes of love. This is God’s way of observing, and it is both freeing and cleansing! - *KVT*

Reflection questions (choose one):

- 1) Do you tend to see people more through the eyes of love or judgment?
- 2) What personality traits of yours have tested the patience of others?

Closing prayer: O Christ, give us eyes that look beyond the surface. Help us see the beauty that resides in others who bear your image. Amen.



My Journal

My Journal

DAY SIX: PARTICIPATION

MORNING: CHOOSING TO ENTER THE UNFAMILIAR

Morning prayer: God of All People, not just those like us, grant us the freedom and curiosity to explore our faith with others who are different. Amen.

Opening question: Describe a time you were invited to try something completely unfamiliar—like a new cuisine or a cultural tradition—that you discovered you enjoyed, perhaps to your surprise.

Scripture reading: Have a member of the group slowly read this text aloud twice as the other members listen with eyes closed.

Acts 17:16-28

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and also in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, “What does this babblor want to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities.” (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means.” Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new.

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as

unknown, this I proclaim to you.²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands,²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’”

Listening: What word or phrase from this passage resonates with you or grabs your attention? (Allow time for any group members who would like to share their phrase).

Devotion: Growing up Presbyterian, I had few interactions with Roman Catholics. However, I absorbed a number of stereotypes about them, especially from the conservative Christian youth group I attended in high school. As a senior, I even wrote an English paper on the heresies of Roman Catholicism. So, anyone who witnessed me 15 years later as I participated in a Roman Catholic Conference in Mexico with the *Comunidades Cristianas de Base* (Grassroots Christian Communities) would have been astonished to see me reverently lay a rose under a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe together with 150 participants in our group.

What was I doing? I was entering into an unfamiliar form of devotion in solidarity with people I had come to love and appreciate. We had been studying the scriptures, sharing our stories, describing our dreams for a world that more closely reflects God’s Realm. Now we were honoring Mary as a champion of justice, the one who had the premonition that her son would be a force for God among the poor and marginalized, saying:

*He (God) has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imaginations of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty. (Luke 1:51-53)*

As I laid my flower down and thanked Mary for her witness and courage, I found my participation in this experience deeply moving and profoundly personal.

The early church, in order to survive and grow, needed to risk encounters with cultures and peoples beyond its experience in Palestine. Saul/Paul, the bicultural apostle, was God's hand-picked servant to accomplish this bridge-building. His encounter with philosophers and thinkers in Athens is a remarkable example of how he fearlessly inserted himself into new places and situations to listen and share his good news. He participated fully in their discussion, listening long enough to find a part of their experience that would allow him to build a bridge and share his own passion for God in Christ.

The same is true for us. If we jump in and participate in experiences that seem foreign, God meets us there. As Paul says, *"In him we live and move and have our being!"* - RM

Reflection questions (choose one):

- 1) When have you encountered ways of worshipping God that seemed weird or odd to you? Did you participate or withdraw from that experience? Why?
- 2) If you have any relationships with persons of other faith traditions, what have you learned from them about how they apprehend the Holy?

3) Share an experience from this mission trip so far that required you to participate in something that seemed foreign to you.

Closing prayer: Creator of Diversity, lead us beyond our fears into a holy curiosity that seeks to discover how you “live and move” in people and practices that are different from ours. Amen.



EVENING: SAYING “YES!” TO AN INVITATION

Evening prayer: Risk Loving God, move us from the safety of our habitual customs into new frontiers of experience. Give us grace to trust that you will always be with us. Amen.

Debriefing question: What was the most meaningful thing you did this day? What made it special for you?

Scripture reading: Have a member of the group slowly read this text aloud twice as the other members listen with eyes closed.

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you. But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin? The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Listening: What word or phrase from this passage resonates with you or grabs your attention? (Allow time for any group members who would like to share their thoughts).

Devotion: I grew up in an upper middle class neighborhood in Tucson, Arizona. I experienced very little exposure to persons living in impoverished circumstances. So, when my sociology professor at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas invited our class to spend the night with a family in public housing, I was hesitant but finally accepted the invitation.

Mary, too, was offered an invitation. God requested her participation in the birthing of the Messiah, the One who would bring the fullness of God's love into human flesh. Mary was given that opportunity and said "Yes." What unfolded for her was a journey of suffering and pain mixed with joy and resurrection, an adventure she could not fully anticipate.

My "yes" to the professor's invitation was an eye-opening experience. As the family in public housing and I watched TV in black and white, cockroaches crawled over the set. When I went to the fridge, I discovered it was empty except for a pitcher of punch and a half-used carton of eggs. Later that night, the lights suddenly went out. The family got a baseball bat and chain from beneath the sofa, hushed each other into silence, then peered out the curtains at the erratic behavior of a glue-sniffing addict shuffling past the apartment. As I tried to sleep on a thin mattress on the floor that night, cockroaches crawled over me.

I was *far* outside my comfort zone! Yet, I also discovered in that home a loving and supportive environment with children who respected their mother, a family that sought to encourage and support one other in the midst of challenges. They generously shared what little they had with a total stranger.

That experience would shape my future in a significant way. After college, I returned to San Antonio to work in that very same community, endeavoring to reduce the causes of poverty that made that family's existence so difficult. I have remained here for 33 years

of ministry! Like Mary, whose yes to God hurled her into a lifetime of unpredictable yet grace-filled struggle, God used my yes to completely redirect the future of my life. Perhaps this mission trip will do the same for you! - RM

Reflection questions (choose one):

- 1) What is the most uncomfortable experience you have ever willingly said “yes” to?
- 2) When you are in a place of discomfort, do you find yourself blinded by it, or are you able to look through it to discover something valuable?
- 3) Have you sensed an invitation from God through any of the experiences of this mission trip? Share them if you are comfortable doing so.

Closing prayer: God of Eternal Yes, you are always inviting us to participate with you in the work of transforming this world. Keep our hearts open so that we may say yes when the invitation comes our way. Amen.

*You never change your life until you step out of your comfort zone;
change begins at the end of your comfort zone.*
— Roy T. Bennett

My Journal

My Journal

DAY SEVEN: RECEIVING AND GIVING

Introduction: embodying *both* these qualities with authenticity. Far too much mission work is a one-way transfer of resources and talent from the “haves” to the “have nots,” a one-sided dynamic that destroys real relationships. It objectifies both the giver and the receiver into one-dimensional caricatures that impoverish us all.

MORNING: OVERCOMING OUR RESISTANCE

Opening prayer: Bounteous God, giver of all good gifts, let the joy of our receiving balance our joy in giving. Amen.

Debriefing question: Share any insights sparked by your journaling this week that are especially meaningful to you.

Scripture reading: Have a member of the group slowly read this text aloud twice as the other members listen with eyes closed.

Mark 14:3-7

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me.

Listening: What word or phrase from this passage resonates with you or grabs your attention? (Allow time for any group members who would like to share their thoughts).

Devotion: This story has multiple levels of meaning.

There is the gratitude of the woman with the alabaster jar, identified elsewhere as a “sinner,” someone who obviously found healing in Jesus’s words.

There is Jesus’s reminder that no matter how hard we work to change the world, poverty and injustice will linger, a vestige of humanity’s inhumanity.

Most importantly for this morning, there is Jesus’s willingness to receive this precious gift. The one who had given exhaustively for three years is near the end of his road, and he willingly accepts the woman’s extravagant offering.

Receiving is hard for many of us. We have been taught that it is better to give than to get. We have been taught to be selfless, serving others without regard for our own wellbeing. Writer Alan Cohen speaks clearly of this in the following words.

"Many people, especially those who grew up in a religion that taught guilt, have a hard time receiving. They believe it is saintly or responsibly sacrificial to deny themselves; giving is virtuous, but receiving is selfish. However, when you allow someone to sincerely help you, you help them. They receive the reward of giving, while you receive the joy of receiving."

Throughout this trip you have been focused on serving and pouring yourself out for others. Just as important is your ability to allow your partners to lavish their love and appreciation upon you.

I once travelled to south India with a group of colleagues, part of a cultural exchange with the Church of South India, a coalition of Protestant denominations. Each of us had different itineraries, traveling through villages in the state of Kerala, visiting homes, churches, and mission stations.

When we gathered at the end of our week to debrief, there was a unanimous exclamation. We had *never* experienced such pure

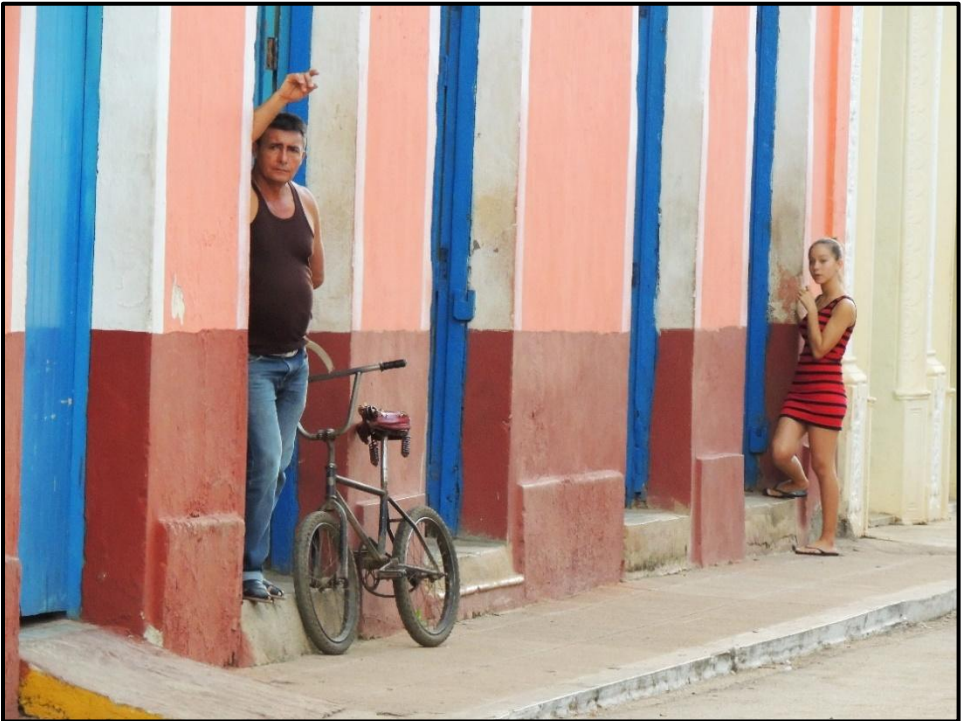
and complete hospitality! It was an outpouring of gracious welcoming that humbled us deeply

One woman in our delegation said, “I admit it was hard for me to be on the receiving end of all that attention. Then I realized what joy it brought to our hosts and I simply let go. It has enriched me beyond measure.” - *KVT*

Reflection questions (choose one):

- 1) Do you find it hard to receive from others? What do you think causes this hesitancy in you?
- 2) Describe a time when an unexpected gift brought great joy to your life.

Closing prayer: Jesus, thank you for modeling both giving *and* receiving. Help us to find the same balance in our own lives. Amen.



EVENING: THE WOUNDEDNESS THAT BINDS US

Opening prayer: Great Physician, in opening ourselves to your healing, teach us to open our lives to others. Amen.

Debriefing question: Share any experiences that stood out for you today. Were you able to receive rather than just give in any of your circumstances?

Scripture reading: Have a member of the group slowly read this text aloud twice as the other members listen with eyes closed.

II Corinthians 12:7b-10

Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Listening: What word or phrase from this passage resonates with you or grabs your attention? (Allow time for any group members who would like to share their thoughts).

Devotion: Though I never met him, a Dutch Catholic priest has had an enormous influence on my life. Henri Nouwen died in 1996, but his writings and commitment to those with intellectual and developmental disabilities lives on in my heart.

He summed up a core truth of the human condition that remains central to everything I do:

Nobody escapes being wounded. We all are wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. The main question is not “How can we hide our wounds?” so we don’t have to be embarrassed, but “How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?” When our wounds cease to be a source of shame, and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers.

Our lack of vulnerability often blocks us from receiving love more fully. When we realize in our heart of hearts that *all* of us are in need of healing and grace, we can risk being more intimate and honest.

As a recovering alcoholic, honesty is at the core of my continued sobriety. If I lose sight of my daily need for God and the companionship of others, I end up in isolation that feeds my disease. I grow restless and disconnected. I agree wholeheartedly with the Apostle Paul as he says, “For whenever I am weak, then I am strong.”

By this time on your trip, many of you have been vulnerable in sharing your inner journeys with each other. I hope you have found a blessed sense of community through this openness. It is my firm belief that beyond all the doctrines, creeds, and theology peddled by the church, our most powerful gift is *community*. People want a place to belong, where they can receive and give love without fear of judgment.

He is long gone now, but another man influenced my life immeasurably. Howard Rice—professor, writer, and former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church—was my spiritual guide during my training at San Francisco Theological Seminary. Gently, with great vulnerability, he helped me reflect not only on my identity as a child of God, but on the areas where the Spirit wanted to shape me further.

Howard suffered from multiple sclerosis, and in the short time I knew him, he went from walking with a cane to confinement in a wheelchair.

I will never forget a worship service at the seminary chapel one Friday afternoon. Howard served communion, and as he lifted the bread I saw him wince with pain. Then he said, “This is my body broken for you, do this often in remembrance of me.”

Jesus opened up his life and let it be broken so that he could receive and pour out the fullness of God’s love. When we, like him, offer our lives more completely to others, it is a sacramental moment, the nexus of both giving and receiving. – *KVT*

Closing prayer: O Christ, give us the courage to risk vulnerability with others. Let the Spirit flow through us as a healing force in this world. Amen.



My Journal

My Journal

DAY SEVEN—GIVING

MORNING: TRUE GENEROSITY

Morning prayer: God of Creation, you shine your sun upon the just and the unjust alike, and your rain nourishes the earth without prejudice. You are as generous with your grace as you are with the sun and the rain. Teach us to be generous as well. Amen.

Opening question: What did you experience as a gift from God yesterday? Perhaps a smile, a word of encouragement, a particular vista, or a generous action?

Scripture reading: Have a member of the group slowly read this text aloud *twice* as the other members listen with eyes closed.

Mark 12: 41-44

Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Listening: What word or phrase from this passage resonates with you or grabs your attention? (Allow time for any group members who would like to share their thoughts).

Devotion: On one of my first trips to Guatemala, I was visiting the work of World Vision in a small Mayan village called San Juan Ostuncalco. They were helping families transition from open wood cooking fires on the floors of their homes to a simple wood stove called an *Estufa Lorena*. We visited the home of a widow who had recently received a new *estufa*, learning how it helped her family by

venting the smoke outside and keeping fire away from children who could easily be burned.

As we were preparing to leave, she offered each of us a simple *tamal* made of ground cornmeal wrapped in a corn husk. There were only three on the metal *comal* or griddle. We tried to refuse, but we soon discovered that to resist would be an insult. We thanked her and ate the warm *tamales*. As we left, our guide confided that she had given us the last food in her home. “No!” we exclaimed. “How could she do that?” This was the first of many shockingly selfless and generous acts I have received from people poorer than I will ever be.

Her gift reminded me of the woman Jesus observed at the temple, the one who gave her last copper coins as an offering. Jesus remarked that she had given more than all the others because they had given from their excess, while she had given out of her needed resources. This woman’s generosity is not an anomaly. It is well-documented that people with the least amount of income give the highest percentage to charity. As a fellow minister once told me, “God pays more attention to what’s left in your wallet or bank account after you give, than to what you put in the plate.”

Truly, I have learned how to be more generous because of my experiences with impoverished people. - *RM*

Reflection questions (choose one):

- 1) When have you had the opportunity to be truly generous, giving not from “the fat” but from “the lean?” How did you feel about that experience?
- 2) Is there someone in your life who is truly generous? How has their example inspired you?
- 3) When were you the beneficiary of another person’s generosity? How did it affect you?

Closing prayer: Giver of All Gifts, remind us again that your divine resources are endless. Refresh our awareness that generosity begets generosity, and that we are always blessed so that we may pass the blessing along to others. Amen.



EVENING: GIVING WITH DIGNITY

Evening prayer: God of Givers and Receivers, help us be aware of both our needs and our gifts so that we may learn how to give and receive with dignity. Amen.

Debriefing question: What needs have you addressed through your mission service this week? What needs of your own have been met by others, perhaps by those whom you served?

Scripture reading: Have a member of the group slowly read this text aloud *twice* as the other members listen with eyes closed.

1 Kings 17:8-16

Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth." She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

Listening: What word or phrase from this passage resonates with you or grabs your attention? (Allow time for any group members who would like to share their thoughts).

Devotion: Upon exiting the airport in less developed countries, American tourists often encounter the insistent appeals of those who beg on the streets for daily bread. This swarm of humanity is overwhelming and difficult to bear, reminding us of our own comparative wealth and our inability to alleviate their suffering. Handing out coins will never solve the systemic problem of their poverty, and often creates more dependence on tourists.

There are other ways to give. I got to experience one in a small village in the Guatemalan highlands called Chuisajcava. Our mission trip had spent the week learning from small coffee growers about their struggle to provide quality beans at a price that enabled them to feed their families. For six days we worked beside them to weed their plots and plant new coffee trees, listening to them describe how difficult it was to get more than 5 to 6 cents a pound for their beans which would sell in the U.S. market for 8-12 dollars a pound! They had formed a cooperative so that they could buy a simple machine. It would allow them to partially process the beans to a point where they were non-perishable, permitting them to sell at a better price. In order to form the co-op, they needed \$300 to pay for incorporation fees. They did not have the money, so they asked our group for help. Many of us were eager to take up a collection, but a seasoned pastor encouraged a different solution. “They do not need a handout,” he said. “Why don’t we buy 30 pounds of coffee from them at the same price we would pay in the market? That way, we would all benefit without anyone losing their dignity.” It was a brilliant solution, and it worked to everyone’s satisfaction!

Elijah invited the widow to give what she could, even in her dire circumstances, to preserve her dignity and fulfill the sacred Middle Eastern obligation of hospitality. Instead of retreating into a mindset of scarcity, Elijah invited her to consider that God’s divine abundance was great enough to provide for her needs. She makes the

cake, gives water to the prophet, and he in turn becomes a channel of God's blessings to her. Both stories invite us to move from forms of charity that foster dependency to those that preserve the dignity of both the giver *and* the receiver. - *RM*

Reflection questions (choose one):

- 1) When have you been approached by beggars or panhandlers, and how did you respond?
- 2) What are some needs that you identified during this trip that are currently being addressed by a form of charity, but which might be better addressed by another solution that preserves the dignity of the givers and receivers?
- 3) If you know one, tell a story in which a long-term solution to a problem of poverty was achieved.

Closing prayer: Grant us, God of Abundant Love, the eyes to see when the way we give is creating dependence, and give us the imagination to create a solution that will bring lasting relief. Amen.



My Journal

My Journal

FINAL MORNING: HEADING HOME

Morning prayer: Loving God, as we leave behind new friends and experiences that will shape us for a lifetime, grant us a deeper love for you and other people. Help us grow from this time into servants who more fully embody the love we know in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Opening question: As you reflect over this mission experience, what are the most significant moments for you, and what makes them noteworthy?

Scripture reading: Have a member of the group slowly read this text aloud *twice* as the other members listen with eyes closed.

Psalm 139: 1-12

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

*You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.*

*You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.*

Even before a word is on my tongue,

O LORD, you know it completely.

*You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.*

*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.*

Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning

*and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.*

Listening: What word or phrase from this passage resonates with you or grabs your attention? (Allow time for any group members who would like to share their thoughts).

Devotion: A profound experience of the Holy can come in many forms: a vision, a mystical revelation, an intimate connection with another person, or a host of other transcendent moments. Personally, I often find myself travelling home from mission trips with a desire to capture them through poetry. I feel a need to hold onto their gifts in a tangible way, so that they do not fade into the gray recesses of my brain. I often feel that God is more real and accessible on mission trips. Perhaps this is true. When we move out of our comfort zones, we open ourselves to messages that are always present, but we don't apprehend them because we are simply not paying attention in the same way.

Psalm 139 describes a God who is present in *every* place. This affirmation is both a comfort (God dwells even in the darkest night) and an invitation for us to experience God in places we normally live (when we lie down and when we rise up).

Mission trips play an important role in shaping our awareness. They sensitize us to God's presence so that we return with expectations to find God in our daily routines. We more fully

appreciate the power of service, inspiring us to engage our own neighborhoods and cities just as we did in a “foreign place.” We are also drawn into new communion with our neighbors from different cultures, traditions or languages, giving us an ability to see common ground.

Whatever the gifts of God’s presence and people you were blessed to discover in this past week, may they not be left behind, but used by the Holy Spirit to continue to open you to Holy Presence upon your return. - *RM*

Reflection questions (choose one):

- 1) What changes have you sensed in yourself as a result of this mission trip?
- 2) How can you imagine living out your faith differently once you return home?
- 3) At what point did you feel the presence of God most fully during this past week?

Closing prayer: O God, grant us grace to grow from this experience of fellowship and service. Lead us into new forms of following Jesus that embody the love we have received. Help us risk new relationships with those who are different from ourselves. Amen.

Mission trips play an important role in shaping our awareness. We more fully appreciate the power of service, inspiring us to engage our own neighborhoods and cities just as we did in a “foreign place.”

CONCLUSION: HAS YOUR TABLE GROWN LARGER?

My spiritual journey has given me a deep appreciation for the symbols and rituals of diverse faiths. No one group of people has a corner on God's truths, and since love is our highest calling, we can hopefully savor our diversity.

One of the sacraments of the Christian faith holds great meaning for me. What we call "the Lord's Supper" or "Holy Communion" is a powerful call to unity. This is especially true in our world that is so often divided. There will forever be differences among us. Issues of conscience, seemingly intractable in daily life, divide us along lines of politics, gender, race and ideology.

What is the point of a communion table that offers its gifts only to a homogeneous group of "cookie-cutter" disciples? How is this a healing force in our fractured world? Instead, let us seek a community of faith that stretches our love muscles, challenging us to find unity in the midst of our diversity. Let the sacrificial love of Christ serve as a model for loving others as much (or even more!) than ourselves.

I've had the honor of serving communion in places near and far: India, Africa, Mexico; hospitals and homes; prisons and open fields. For billions of people, the communion table is the biggest table on our planet, still expanding in all directions of the compass.

We hope your table has grown this week. We hope that you now feel connected through bonds with new mission partners as well as with your group.

At the conclusion of every Lord's Supper, I remind us of a central truth.

"O God, we have been fed and nourished at your table not just for our own benefit and healing, but to serve the world in the name of your son, Jesus. Give us strength through the Spirit to be your ambassadors of abundance and love to *all* people."

This is our final charge to all of you. Take the lessons you have learned on this trip and tuck them into your hearts like pearls of great price. Let them guide you from now on in your mission endeavors wherever God calls you.

It has been our privilege to accompany you on this pilgrimage. Grace and peace to all of you! We hope to see you on the mission trail! – *KVT*



Record of My Trip

Dates: _____

Places I visited:

Names/Signatures of my team members:
