

The Volunteer's Back Pocket Guide to Youth Mission Trips

10 Necessities for Volunteer Leaders

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INTRODUCTION

(I can see you're about to skip past this section. You're going to miss some good stuff...)

Congratulations! You've agreed to serve as an adult leader on a youth mission trip. That means you probably fit into one of three categories:

- You're an enthusiastic adult who loves teenagers and has a God-given desire to make a positive impact in their lives.
- You're a parent who wants to build a stronger bond with your teenager and you've heard that can happen on a mission trip.
- You're someone who has a hard time saying no and just happened to walk through the church lobby when the youth pastor was looking for a volunteer.

No matter which category you fall into, this book is for you, and I'm truly glad you're reading it. Traveling with kids can be an exhilarating, exhausting, frustrating, enjoyable, poignant, frightening, memorable, and life-changing experience. And that's just within the first hour after you've left the church parking lot! Through 20 years of youth ministry, I've enjoyed some of the most rewarding moments of my life among kids on mission trips. (And I'm not just making that up!) It's not for everyone, but with the right attitude and a few timely suggestions you can look forward to an incredible experience.

In the pages of this book I'll offer a few keys that could make the difference between enduring a trip with teenagers and having the experience of a lifetime. This guide is small and easy to tuck into your pocket. (That's probably why it's titled *The Volunteer's Back Pocket Guide to Youth Mission Trips*—just a thought. I, however, wanted to title it *The Pirate's Guide to Youth Mission Trips*,

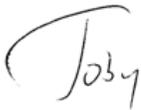
because each chapter is titled with an R-word. No one would let me—argh!)

Anyway, carry this book with you, and take it out when you need a little encouragement. Or get together regularly with the other adults on your trip to go over what you've read. Either way, I hope you discover what I have: There's no experience in the world quite like going on a mission trip with teenagers.

And two quick tips as you get ready to keep reading. Take an extra minute or two with each chapter to write out the answers to the reflection questions—for two reasons. One, it truly will help your mind and spirit absorb the truths you're about to encounter. And two, it will be fun to look back after the trip is done and see how far you've come.

I'd love to hear how your trip goes—or try to help you with questions or concerns you might have. So keep in touch...
trowe@groupworkcamps.com.

Now...off you go!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Toby". The lettering is fluid and connected, with a large initial "T" and a trailing flourish.

Toby

CHAPTER

I

REVEAL

Yes, Jesus, I'll hurry up and wait for you.

SCRIPTURE:

³⁰Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” ³¹The man replied, “How can I, unless someone instructs me?” And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him (Acts 8:30-31 NLT).

Lots of amazing personal aha’s happen on a mission trip. Two of the most remarkable are what I call “God sightings” and “teachable moments.” In the Scripture at the beginning of this chapter, God alerts Philip to the fact that a teachable moment is coming his way. He’s so eager to take advantage of it that he runs to meet the Ethiopian man in the carriage.

You may not have to do a lot of running, but you absolutely must have your eyes and ears open. For multiple reasons, a mission trip provides more teachable moments and God

sightings than most any other youth event. Youth ministry experts will tell you that any multi-day event (such as a retreat, mission trip, or ski trip) with teenagers creates exponentially more opportunities than an evening or even a daylong event. When students get out of their comfort zone and don't get a break from people, there's no choice but to drop their guard. They can't keep pretending to be someone they're not. You can't maintain a façade of happiness if your life is sad. When the defenses are lowered, the teachable moments happen.

Those are times when you can share your own experience, strength, and hope with teenagers. You can share your struggles in life and talk about how God and your faith played a part. Naturally, there are boundaries combined with some good judgment. We'll help sort that out in future chapters. But God has something to share with students through you!

That can happen in something as simple as sharing encouraging words from Scripture. A friend of mine tells the story about when his mom died. Her death was sudden and unexpected. When he boarded a plane for the long flight to where she lived, he wound up sitting next to a Catholic priest. My friend was carrying his Bible, even though his mother's passing made him too distraught to read it. Throughout the flight as they talked, the priest would borrow the Bible, look up exactly the right passage, and share it with my friend. Because the priest was ready and willing, it was an awesome God sighting that my friend will never forget.

In moments of great joy, distress, fear, anxiety—and any other strong emotion—doors open for you to speak and for others to speak to you. In my experience, these moments have happened on every mission trip I've ever been on. It doesn't

happen for everyone, but it happens for someone every single time. And when you witness God using you or someone around you, your faith is permanently forged into something that it wasn't just moments before. That's the magic of a mission trip. You're immersing yourself in what God is doing—every minute of every day. So be ready for God to show up and do something!

Being ready is first and foremost about being available. God will work out the “when” and the “where.” Your job is simply to be ready to share your story. Yes, knowing Scripture verses can be very helpful. But being available and ready isn't about having exactly the right answer for every situation. It's really about allowing God to have his way with you. If you read the entire story of Philip and the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40) you'll see that the Holy Spirit said, “Go over and walk along beside the carriage.”

Philip wasn't told what would happen, what to say, or even how long it might take. Just “go over there.” A mission trip is a great big “go over there” opportunity to minister to your students. Like Philip, be ready for something to happen.

REFLECTION:

Read the entire story of Philip and the Ethiopian in Acts 8:26-40, and consider this:

- When have you experienced a teachable moment?
(Take time to write down what happened that made it teachable.)

- Think about keeping a journal about the mission trip. Start it now and begin practicing looking for God sightings and teachable moments.

- Look for opportunities to share your God sightings as you and the rest of the team prepare for the trip.

PRAYER:

Lord, thank you for making yourself visible to me. I love seeing your handiwork. Open my eyes and heart to see teachable moments—moments when I can be taught and moments when I might be able to share with others. I can't wait to see what you have in store for us on this trip. Amen.

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