



A GATHERING PLACE
FOR SHORT-TERM MISSION ARTICLES,
RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Effective Discipleship in Mission Trips

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We all agree that mission trips hold a unique opportunity for spiritual growth in the lives of the participant, but it doesn't automatically happen, and change isn't always long-term. This can be for many reasons, but perhaps one of the biggest reasons is because the trip is an isolated event in the life of the goer. The trip acts as a *drop* instead of a *ripple*.

Think of a drop of water on a window. It starts as a drip falling in the air, then lands on the window and sits there. It doesn't move, it doesn't change, and it doesn't affect any other drop. It simply lands and sits there. While the main focus of a mission trip is for those we intend to serve, rather than ourselves, we would be remiss to ignore the opportunity of how a mission trip impacts the discipleship process of a goer. We shouldn't be content with the idea of a trip being a drop.



Rather than being a drop that just sits there, we want a mission trip to be more like a ripple in the lives of our goers. The trip occurs like a drip but, instead of just sitting there as a drop, it becomes a ripple that expands, creating other ripples, and even touching other moments in the participants' lives. For this to happen, however, we have to be intentional about the mission trip and the discipleship process. The participants must see how this incredibly crazy experience, in a far-off place, is not just an isolated moment but is part of a life-long journey of following Jesus.



Before we go too far, let's define a couple of terms that will be key. We often use them interchangeably, but this actually leads us to the problem we addressed above. We can define **Spiritual growth** in a number of ways, but the essence of the term is that it is *positive change in a person's character that makes them more like Christ*. We often think of this as being the same as **discipleship**. However, we aren't simply linear people. In other words, we don't only progress forward. Much to our dismay, we are beings who can easily take one step forward and two steps back. Spiritual growth can happen, but we can also digress.

Discipleship, however, is more process orientated. Again, we could define **discipleship** in a variety of ways, but the idea is that it is *the process by which someone becomes more like Christ*. When goers participate in mission trips that aren't connected to their discipleship process, there is often either no spiritual growth or, when there is growth, it is temporary and doesn't take hold.

The challenge is to integrate the mission trip experience for the goer into their discipleship journey. Some ways to do this include:

- requiring mentors who are part of their spiritual community
- demonstrating how their training and preparation applies to their whole life and not just their trip
- intentionally looking for what God is doing during the mission trip that can continue afterwards
- providing ways to serve locally, which build on their experience

Check out the SOE webinar *Effective Discipleship in Mission Trips* to dig more deeply into this subject.