

It's a

Stretch!



Practical suggestions for being completely flexible on a short-term missions trip

BY GLADYS THOMPSON

Our former Office Manager often walked around the office with one or more elastic bands on her wrist which she used as reminders of things she needed to do. May I suggest that among the things you plan to take with you on a short-term missions trip is an elastic band as a reminder to be flexible and that you will be stretched when going to another country.

...a reminder to be flexible and that you will be stretched when going to another country

stretched to the limits. Instead, you can be flexible and stretch yourself in becoming a better person.

PHYSICALLY FLEXIBLE

Perhaps you planned to teach a sewing class but instead end up making a dress for someone who doesn't have one. Things change. Planning is necessary but things may not go exactly as planned. Instead of asking, "Why can't I accomplish what I set out to do?" ask "What is God trying to do here?"

The locals may not understand your language but they can read your actions and attitudes. Never laugh at or belittle something new or strange or recoil from poverty conditions. Be careful of gestures which may mean one thing in Canada but something quite different in another culture. When you experience an inconvenience or discomfort, maintain a Christ-like attitude.

You may need to adjust your style of dress, behaviour, and activity. You may have food hang-ups, but refrain from making faces, graciously accepting their hospitality. Try to imagine how you would feel if your guests turned up their noses at your delicacies. You are there representing Christ who said to "eat what is set before you" (Luke 10:8).

You may have to adjust to your sleeping quarters, and there may be a team member who snores very loudly. You may need to ask God to help you love other members of the team and to adjust to their little idiosyncrasies just as they adjust to yours. You can stretch yourself by taking the Golden Rule to the extreme.

MENTALLY FLEXIBLE

Going on a short-term missions trip will help you learn about God's incredible world and the people he has created.

Take the time to find out as much as you can about your target mission. Write what you learn in a journal to take with you. Check out maps, talk to people who have been there, and understand how the currency system works. Find out about good videos or books that will help you learn about their culture and what is important to them. Especially find out what role religion plays in their everyday lives.

Try to look at things from their perspective and participate in their lives. Understanding their way of life will help you to learn better ways of ministering to them.

Don't be deceived into believing you are powerful and can do things better than the locals or even the International Workers in your host country. Consider how you would feel if someone showed up in your neighbourhood and offered to 'solve' all your problems—then left town after a week.

John 1:14 reminds us, "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." If we are truly representing Christ, our primary objective will also be to identify with the people we have come to serve.



SPIRITUALLY FLEXIBLE

God is moving in places we have never seen or heard about. He is touching the nations and speaking to them in ways we may never comprehend. You're not taking God to these people; he has been there all along. Ask him to prepare you for what you are about to experience and expect him to use you.

Stretch yourself spiritually by making time to pray and keeping a prayer journal. Write out your testimony so you can be prepared if you have an open door to tell someone why you are a Christian.

Build relationships with the locals by worshipping with them. Notice and enjoy the differences in the way they glorify God and join them in it. Be a good example, making sure you are not just preaching the gospel, but

...our primary objective will also be to identify with the people we have come to serve

showing God's love.

By being flexible and open to learning new things about God and his people, you will find this trip to be worth every penny, every prayer, and every step you take in growing physically, mentally and spiritually. ☩



Gladys Thompson is Communications Coordinator at The Christian and Ministry Alliance in Canada National Ministry Centre

PRAYING FOR AN STM TEAM

- Pray daily that members will know and respond positively to God's call on their lives
- Meet with the members prior to the trip to find out their hopes, their fears, and how you can specifically pray for them
- Ask the Lord to abundantly provide for their financial needs
- Pray God's peace will surpass their fears, real or imaginary
- Pray for extra strength and ability to fulfill their responsibilities at work and at home prior to leaving on the trip
- Pray for safety as they travel and that they will be cautious at all times, especially in nations with poor health standards and personal security measures
- Pray flight arrangements will go smoothly and all luggage will reach its destination
- The team will be facing jet lag, lack of sleep, different foods and intense schedules so pray they will be kept healthy and strong
- Pray for team bonding; that each member will be considerate, kind and forgiving
- Know the planned schedule for each day of the trip and, if possible, keep in touch with them by email so you can pray for specific needs
- The enemy is out to destroy God's work, so pray the team will have discernment and inner strength to withstand and will gain the victory in every situation
- God has chosen each team member for a specific reason, so pray his will may be done in each individual heart
- Pray the team's labour will touch many lives for Christ and that they will be sensitive to the Lord's leading
- Meet with team members upon their return; really listen to them, and continue to pray for them:
 - Now that the excitement of going on the trip is over, and they are extremely tired, their emotions will be in turmoil
 - They have experienced so much during their trip, but everything at home seems the same and no one seems to truly understand what they've experienced
 - They no longer have the intense daily spiritual emphasis and team fellowship and may feel a sense of loneliness
 - They may feel guilt and disgust at their own society's lack of understanding

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Ten ways to ruin short-term mission trips: <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/ruin.htm>

Group dynamics: <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/groupmem.htm>

Ten Commandments for participants: <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/ten.htm>

Coping with culture shock: <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/shock.htm>

Preparing to witness: <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/assess.htm>