

Re-Entry

...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

-Philippians 1:6

Goal: To challenge team members to prepare for their re-entry now so they will be able to maximize their short-term missions experience.

Part I: Going Back Home

The short-term missionary experience is like being uprooted from everything that is familiar back home and being transplanted to another part of the world. God plants you in another country. Your roots expand. Your faith grows. And then, you return home.

A Different Set of Lenses

- You return home as a different you. It is important to process what God has done in your life.
- You are now looking at the world through a different set of eyes. Your eyes have been transformed through the short-term missions experience.
- You come back with a new set of questions to ask. God has changed your world-view and how you spend your money. “Business as usual” will not be easy.

Re-entry Has Great Potential for Changing Lives

- Maximize your short-term missions experience for the kingdom of God. Your life, your church, your family, and others around you can be impacted through you.
- Integrate what God has done. What God started can be continued through your life.
- Examine the choices you are making. How do you spend your money? How do you spend your time? What relationships are you investing in?

Re-entry Reflection Questions

1. How have you or will you change?
2. How can I be prepared for how much change I will have to face about myself?
3. How can I integrate these changes into my day-to-day life?
4. How can I transfer my short-term missions experience to my “spiritual checking account” so that it is readily available to pass on to others?
5. You may feel sad when you return home. What do you do now that a part of your heart has been left behind? What do you do with that grief?

Re-entry Reminders

1. Acknowledge your feelings of grief.
2. Realize that the impact of the short-term missions experience has given you a tender heart.
3. Allow yourself time to grieve.

Power Point

Donna Gaffney, in her book *The Seasons of Grief*, states that people deal with loss through grieving. She defines “grief work” as the emotional work one does to understand and adjust to one’s loss. She further posits that “closure is an important part of the grief work.” Team members undergoing grief during their re-entry can find ways to commemorate the event or person they are missing. (Reunions are excellent opportunities for commemoration.)

Closure

Prepare to put a good closure to your short-term mission experience.

- Say good-bye to everyone significant to that event.
- Say thank-you to everyone who made your missions experience significant for you.
- Resolve any conflict that may have developed during the trip.
- Remember that good endings lead to good beginnings.

When you come home, find those links between your short-term experience and your life now.

- You may find that things will bother you when you come home—things such as affluence. You’ve witnessed so much poverty. Now you are coming home to an affluent country. You are coming home as the voice or advocate for the people. Suddenly, the headlines are more than headlines. They have faces. You have seen the faces.
- Hold off on making drastic changes.
- Take time to reflect quietly. What does God want me to do from now on?
- Focus on one or two things.

When you look at entry with re-entry in mind, you are able to maximize and capitalize the trip for God’s glory. Submit your experience to God. Ask him to show you what he wants you to do.

- Re-entry is not an afterthought.
- Re-entry is an event.
- Re-entry is a process.

Power Point

And Ending... A Beginning

Though re-entry suggests an end, it also ushers a new beginning:

- an end of a trip, but the beginning of another journey
- an end to a foreign experience, but the beginning of feeling foreign back home
- an end to being/feeling special, but the beginning of being ordinary with a special heart for God and for people
- an end to being stared at, but the beginning of looking at people and the world through different eyes
- an end to simple living, but the beginning of a different lifestyle
- an end to crowded housing, but the beginning of a bigger world view
- an end to eating strange food, but the beginning of friendships with the strangers and internationals in your midst.

Is there life after the short-term missions experience?

Yes, but it is going to be a different life.

Discussion Points:

- Is re-entry an afterthought, an event, or a process?
- Before you are uprooted to another culture, consider these questions:
 1. What changes in your life are you hoping to see as a result of the short-term missions trip?
 2. Which do you think is easiest—adjusting to a new culture, or readjusting to your home culture? Why?
 3. Discuss different ways that you may grieve.

Part II: Questions About Re-entry

What reactions can we expect from re-entry?

People experience a variety of reactions to re-entry, everything from excitement to the urge to sell everything they own. Generally, people do one of the following:

- Isolation: They isolate themselves from the mainstream of life.
- Imitation: They blend into the mainstream. They want to get back to normal.
- Integration: They put lessons learned into action in their life.

How can short-termers connect back with family and friends?

People don't know how to respond sometimes. Allow yourself to be the center of the conversation when appropriate but listen to your friends and family as well. Realize that life went on for them while you were away.

What is the best way to debrief?

- On-site—gather the team together before you return home. Discuss everyone's perceptions. Discuss how God was at work.
- End of trip gathering or weekend trip. Now we are home. What does it mean to get back to life?

Power Points

Debriefing triggers the re-entry process. Although it suggests an end, it also ushers in a new beginning. Look back and look forward and ask the following questions.

Looking back:

- What were your expectations of this trip?
- How were they met?
- What did you do on the trip and how did you feel about it?
- What was one answered prayer that you had?
- Which special story can you share?

Looking forward:

- What changes have you noticed about yourself, and how may they affect your life at home?
- What priorities need to be rearranged?
- How do you hope to keep your vision for God and the world alive?
- What is your main concern about returning home?

Closing thoughts

- Prepare for your re-entry. Don't expect things to be the same. In the same way you prepared for your entry, prepare for coming home.

- Prepare for what God has in mind for you. Ask Him to help you during the transition. Battle doesn't just occur overseas; it occurs upon your return as well. God wants those seeds that were planted to grow. Satan wants to destroy them.

Discussion Points

- How should you begin to prepare for re-entry?
- What are some ways you can reconnect with friends and family upon your return?

Prayer Points

- That your re-entry will be maximized for the kingdom.
- That God will use your short-term experience to impact those around you.
- The short-term mission trip may have ended, but a new life has just begun.

Part III: Living With Purpose

Scripture References: Matthew 16:24, 26; Jonah 2:7-8

- Live the end in mind.
- Are you living to die or dying to live?
- Live with a purpose so you'll die with no regrets.

Our journey with God is paved with surrender and obedience.

- Jonah 2:7-8
- Forfeit—give up a right.
- Idol—any person or things which blocks your full view of the grip of the cross.

We can all become “heroes” of the faith.

- They each had a common denominator—they embraced God.

Achieve your goal.

- Define your destination.
- Write a mission statement. This will guide and inspire you in your life journey.
- Write an epitaph. It will give you clarity and vision for your purpose.

Remember...

- We can all live with a purpose, so we die with no regrets.
- We must embrace His grace.
- We can all be heroes of the faith.
- The world is waiting.

Team Exercises:

- Define your destination. Where do you want to be five, ten, fifteen years from now?
- How will you get there? Write a mission statement for your life.
- Write an epitaph. What do you want people to say about you after you finish the race?
- Make preparations to share your missions experience with your church upon your return.

Leader's Final Checklist:

- Leave an itinerary and emergency phone numbers with family of team members.
- Distribute prayer cards to family and friends. You can make simple prayer cards using a team photo and basic information about your trip.
- Provide each team member with a wallet-size card listing emergency telephone numbers and insurance information.

The Good-bys

Are you wondering how you will be able to say good-by to your new friends? Are you prepared for that emotionally draining experience? You are leaving friends you have grown to love and may never see again. You are bringing closure to a profound time of growth. And you may find that both you and your hosts shed tears as you take your leave.

Throughout the Vacation with a Purpose (VWAP) you may have looked forward to returning home to the friends, family, car, ice, and flush toilets that await you. But on the last day these desires seem curiously distant and unimportant leaving tears in your heart. It puts a hole in your heart that only your new friends can fill. We need to remember that these good-bys are not forever. Believers have eternity to be together. And then language will be no barrier! This ending is really only a prologue to a greater adventure that awaits those who love the Lord.

The following items may help you keep your good-bys in perspective, even if they seem to make them no easier.

1. *Do not be afraid to show and express emotion.* More than likely the nationals have fewer inhibitions than you, so learn from them! Hugs and words of appreciation are expressions you will not forget.
2. *Treasure the moment.* So often we live our lives for the future and fail to appreciate the present moment, one that cannot be duplicated. So be present and value what is happening.
3. *Talk about your feelings with the team after you have departed.* This will create an environment where others may feel it's okay to share their grief and joy.
4. *Do not expect others to handle the good-bys as you do.* We all respond differently to emotionally charged events. Be accepting of others' inhibitions or tears.
5. *Get plenty of photographs or video footage.* You (and perhaps only you) will value this once at home. You may also want to send photographs to the host community once you're home. (Be sure photographs and video are appropriate in the host community.)
6. *Agree to pray for one another.* This is the most important expression of love you may be able to share with your newfound friends. Let them now they will be in your prayers.
7. *Avoid making financial commitments during the good-bys.* You may confuse a very valuable time by introducing finances into your farewells. Furthermore, you might make a commitment you are unable to keep once home. Wait and think through your financial decisions.