Psalm 96:3 (ESV)
Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name;
make known his deeds among the peoples!

Psalm 105:1 (ESV)
And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world
as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Matt 24:14 (NIV)

The Role of Spiritual and Material Poverty

In the West, especially in developed countries, we tend to see poverty in very different terms than in developing countries. We’ve been conditioned to think of “the poor” at home as those who fall below a “poverty line,” usually referring to a percentage of a country’s median or average income. The portion of the population falling below that invisible line may experience some level of deprivation and hardship, but they may appear to bystanders as little different than those in what we call the middle class.

But in most other parts of the world, the differences are stark. A child living in poverty may go days without eating, never see the inside of a classroom in their whole childhood, and might even die from what we would consider a simple case of diarrhea.

The starkness of the poverty we see abroad, while heartbreaking, often obscures the even deeper spiritual poverty that lies at the heart of the human condition. Of course, not every individual or community’s spiritual condition is directly responsible for their own poverty. But in a larger sense all poverty has, at its heart, the fallen nature of man.

Because man could only be rescued by the God who redeems, our condition in this life will only be permanently free of poverty, disease, abuse, strife, and oppression when this world is fully restored. Until then, God’s response to poverty is the same as His response to all other human ills: the life, death and resurrection of Christ restored our broken relationship with Him and gave us the power, through the Holy Spirit, to minister His love and grace to the hurting in our world.

And that brings us to our response to poverty.

Just as we are His emissaries to the world to deliver the Good News of redemption, we are also His “ministers” to the hurting and broken. Jesus reminds us that “you will always have the poor among you…” (John 12:8), but we’re never absolved of our responsibility to be part of the answer: “For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore, I command you, saying, ‘You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.’” (Deut. 15:11).

(It’s clear that when thinking about “your land,” God intends for us to be His grace-bearers to all those we can reach, not just those within our own national borders.)

Although some developing countries have various measures of safety nets for the poor, the cracks are large enough to leave millions without the basics of life. As Christians we are obligated, and privileged, to deliver material relief and to address the broken relationships that allow poverty to strip hope and marginalize the voiceless. As we think through our own responsibilities, it’s helpful to remember:

Caring for the poor was not invented or initiated by any government or political movement. Rather, God prescribed His people to look after the needs of the broken, oppressed and hungry. God’s concern for those who are impoverished and unable to free themselves from the yoke of oppression is a theme that is woven throughout Scripture.

Material poverty (as well as the spiritual poverty that underlies it) is a complex problem beyond human ability to “solve.” Our success in helping to alleviate the suffering poverty causes is partly dependent on our ability to look honestly at the complexities and respond with humility, committed to learning as well as to
helping, Corbett and Fikkert said it well:

Going as learners and encouragers focused on the gifts God has put in low-income communities does not mean we dismiss the harsh reality of material poverty—or the acute forms of pain that accompany it. The goal is not to simply see poverty as irrelevant, or to view material poverty itself as a spiritual virtue or as a mark of more authentic faith. Rather, the goal is to affirm the dignity of the materially poor in the midst of their very real pain, and learn from them as they experience things that many affluent Christians have never faced.2

**Short-Term Relief vs. Long-Term Development**

The debate about short-term relief mission efforts versus long-term development is almost as old as the church itself. In some circles the two are present as at odds, or part of a “zero-sum game.” In reality, almost all Scripture-based mission work will involve some of both.

A few definitions will be helpful:

**Relief:** An effort to “stop the bleeding.” It is the urgent and temporary provisions of emergency aid to reduce immediate suffering from a natural or man-made crisis, and it primarily utilizes a provider-receiver dynamic.

**Rehabilitation:** An effort to restore people back to their pre-crisis state after the initial bleeding is stopped, while also laying the basis for future development. In rehabilitation, people begin to contribute to improving their situation.

**Development:** Walking with people across time in ways that move all the people involved—both the “helpers” and the “helped”—closer to being in right relationship with God, self, others, and the rest of creation than they were before…. Development is often referred to as “empowerment.” It avoids “doing for” and focuses on “doing with.”3

At Kids Alive, we want to deliver relief/rehabilitation when necessary and continue with the kind of development that looks far beyond urgent, short-term needs, to a future where locals are empowered to help themselves. And, of course, we want to do it all in an atmosphere saturated with the hope of the Gospel and Jesus’ promised abundant life.

Yes, after the earthquake, homes need to be rebuilt. After the flooding, debris must be removed to help prevent disease. Following a devastating dry season, famine will set in without immediate deliveries of food, water, and medicine.

But once the food has arrived, roofs are replaced, and roads are cleared, long-term recovery begins. And in areas crippled by poverty rather than by disaster, development addresses the needs for local restructuring of resources, for education, for justice for victims, etc. To be sure, there are some immediate needs that absolutely must be met quickly, but teaching, helping, and living alongside those in desperate situations is where Kids Alive has planted its flag.

We, both the organization and individual Service Teams, must guard against seeing ourselves as “saviors” in the areas where we minister, no matter how desperate the conditions. Rather, we are serving as a “Barnabas,” as encouragers and facilitators. We want to raise up indigenous leaders and planners who are invested in their own communities and therefore have far-sighted investment there. And we want to actively work against being “paternalistic,” implying that because we may have the resources, we also have all the answers. We aren’t there to show them “our way.” We are there to show them Jesus.

Too often, well-meaning mission organizations and volunteers have left a situation worse than they found it. The boxes of food are emptied. The medicine chest is now bare. The well still has no clean water—and the ground is strewn with empty plastic water bottles. Local relationships and perceptions of the helpers are threadbare.
Kids Alive wants to do more than deliver food; we want to develop better food production practices. We want to assist in the digging of new wells with new pumps that will last for decades. We want to leave the people to whom we are ministering with the clear message of the Gospel of redemption, and we show it with our actions.

So whether you are partnering with us for a week, a month, a year, or a career, we encourage you to join us in taking the long-term view of the work and to give all glory to God as we labor together.

**Do Unto Others: Helping Without Hurting**

One of the common pitfalls of short-term mission happens when we misunderstand or misapply Matthew 7:12, commonly referred to as The Golden Rule: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you…”

We tend to think in terms of what we believe is ultimately good for those we serve, and not so much about how our attempts to help might inconvenience or even alienate those who are on the mission field doing the daily, sometimes grindingly hard work of building relationships and clearing the way for change. No matter how sincere our intentions and intensive our preparations, we must not close our eyes to the potential for disruption, misunderstanding, and fatigue that might accompany our best efforts.

Some logistical disruption is to be expected when a team from another country arrives for a short stay and needs to be housed, fed, transported, and translated. Being aware of the potential for the difficulties that your team’s visit might present and being alert for ways to minimize inconveniences can go a long way toward fostering the kind of atmosphere in which meaningful work can take place.

For a very humorous take on this topic and some great “how not to” examples, see the video “Viking Mission Trip: A Cautionary Tale” from the Chalmers Center (https://vimeo.com/126307760).

**Is It Worth Going?**

There is a considerable amount of debate, complete with statistics and dollar signs, about the question, “Wouldn’t it be better to just send the money instead of going to the field myself?” It’s a good question about a complex problem, and it can’t be answered simply by “doing the math.”

Simple calculations illustrate the point: the youth group from First Church on Main is no better at painting a schoolroom than skilled local labor who will do it for $2.00 an hour. And local tradesmen need the work and are already there, making the project more time- and cost-effective.

On a grander scale:

...the average cost of an international STM [short-term mission] is around $1400 per person. Based on a 2005 survey, Robert Wuthnow and Stephen Offutt estimate that 1.6 million US adults travel on an international STM each year. In light of [this] research, the cost of only adult, international STMs could easily add up to over $2.2 billion per year. As Wuthnow points out, even a conservative figure of $1.6 billion would pay the yearly wages of roughly four million people living in extreme poverty.

If we stop there, then often the answer to our question above would be, “Yes. Stay home and send money.” But as is often the case with complex problems, a deeper look tells a quite different story. It’s not all about the math...it’s about people and relationships.

First, there’s the very real impact of sending a person from our culture to another culture:

It is obvious that people in needy situations appreciate monetary help but they also need the personal support of an individual and value greatly what they perceive as the sacrifice one makes
to leave their homeland to travel to be with them. That should not surprise us. Isn’t that how God demonstrated His love?

Second, there is no denying the effect a mission trip has on the person going. There will be short-term personal growth as well as the potential for life-altering change, including the possibility that the experience on the mission field will spark consideration of longer-term or even career missions. Simply writing a check to a missions-related cause just doesn’t carry that power.

Additionally, there is the corporate effect that short-term missions have on both cultures. A unilateral view of missions perceives that one party helps and the other party receives. But a more holistic view is that missions are bilateral: there is mutual blessing and mutual receiving.

One of the lasting effects of your Service Team experience is likely to be your increased awareness of, sensitivity to, and sense of responsibility for missions on a broader scale. As you participate in one area of mission effort, you’ll become freshly aware of the problems and the promise in missions as a whole. Your giving, your praying, and your advocacy for the worldwide mission effort are bound to be changed forever.

These are impacts that don’t have a price tag. Short-term missions don’t mean short-term value, in your life or in the lives of those you serve.

As you go into the far corners of God’s world, affirming your common ground experience before the Lord and mutually blessing one another, is there a price you can put on that experience? It seems the only price to consider is the extreme loss God’s people will suffer if you don’t go in His name and for His glory.

Risk: Counting the Cost

Mission trips, like all travel, are inherently dangerous. We don’t want team members to take unnecessary risk, but we also don’t want our personal safety to become the focus of our trip.

How much risk is acceptable? How do we define risk? How do we weigh risk? What is lost when we “manage” risk? What is lost when we don’t risk? We can’t cover all the things that can go wrong. But these things must be kept in mind about risk:

1. **Remember that Jesus rewards risk.** Long before accountants noticed the market rewards risk, Jesus promised to reward those who risk for him (Matt. 6:25-33).

2. **Remember that there are no guarantees.** Life is a risk. But take simple precautions. Use safe airlines. Be in partnership with local people who can advise you on safety issues.

3. **All of life involves risk, but we don’t look for risk either.** Thrill seeking is not a part of missions. There are plenty of thrills on a mission trip without manufacturing them.

4. **When you do need to risk, risk on things that are worth it.** Sometimes that means spiritual realities the world simply cannot see; sometimes it means doing things that will build trust. Sometimes we eat risky food to build trust, for instance.

5. **Manage risk by training yourself to do three things: be alert, be knowledgeable and be wise.** Watch what is going on around you. Think through the things you can do to reduce risk at no expense to cultural sensitivity: walk in groups; keep personal articles to a minimum; limit spending money.
Why Am I Going? Fulfilling YOUR Unique Purpose

Just as important as the general question of giving vs. going is the more personal consideration of “Why am I going?” It’s not uncommon to hear a Service Team member say, “I went expecting to be a blessing and ended up being the one blessed.” But what does this mean? What is motivating me to go rather than to stay? What is motivating my church or organization to send me? And what are we hoping to accomplish?

Richard Stearns, writing in *The Hole in Our Gospel*, gives us a starting point:

The kingdom of which Christ spoke was one in which the poor, the sick, the grieving, cripples, slaves, women, children, widows, orphans, lepers, and aliens – “the least of these” (Matt. 25:40 KJV) – were to be lifted up and embraced by God. It was a world order in which justice was to become a reality, first in the hearts and minds of Jesus’ followers, and then to the wider society through influence. Jesus’ disciples were to be “salt” and “light” to the world. They were to be the “yeast” that leavens the whole loaf of bread. His was not intended to be a far-off, distant kingdom...[it] was a call for a redeemed world order populated by redeemed people – *now*.

Naturally, your team will have one or more specific “tasks” to attend to during your trip. Understanding how these tasks fit into the kingdom-building to which we are called will determine not just how effective each task will be, but how receptive we’ll be to unexpected opportunities, interruptions, and genuine learning along the way.

Another way to approach the trip with intentionality is to focus on preparations for our major purposes in going. If we’re going to support a missionary, how can we specifically plan for encouraging that missionary? If one of our purposes is to expose young people to missions efforts, let’s hear testimonies and explore with them the avenues to becoming a missionary or intern. If the purpose of the trip is for “exposure” to world needs, let’s have a good balance between seeing a wide variety of needs and seeing those needs addressed.

“Going” without clear intentions and goals leaves us vulnerable to shallowness, to disillusionment, and to the possibility that the good we do might be outweighed by misunderstanding and burden on those in the field. It’s crucial that we discern our motives and clarify goals in order to make this involvement in missions one that leaves both us and those we are serving with an unmistakable sense that “it was worth it.”

Here are some questions to help crystallize motives and goals:

1. Is the tourism aspect of our trip more important than our connections with the people we are going to spend time with?
2. Is accomplishing something the reason I am going, and would I feel the trip would still be worth it if we didn’t complete a task but ended up developing relationships and learning about the people in our host country?
3. Am I looking more forward to bonding with my team members than the people we’re there to serve?
4. Do I consider myself a “guest” of the host ministry and country rather than a “fixer”?
5. What is my plan to encourage the people we’re visiting on this trip?
6. How will our visit enhance the ministry and further their goals on the field?

Exploring answers to these questions, alone and with your team members, is an essential part of carrying out The Great Commission and maximizing every opportunity your Service Team is given. “Going” involves listening to God, letting the Holy Spirit lead, allowing Jesus space to transform us along the way.

The Spiritual Emphasis in Service

As we continue thinking about intentional preparation for our trip, we must not minimize the spiritual
emphasis we desire to bring to the field and to those with us on the team. There is work to be done, there are relationships to be built with children, staff, and surrounding communities. But in doing all these, we must keep in mind the Biblical foundation for our mission.

Taking a mission trip to run sports camps, do crafts, or lead other activities with the sole purpose of having fun will not help accomplish our long-term goals of providing Christian care and developing Christian character. If the only purpose of hosting teams was to entertain kids, we could hire clowns! We want teams to focus on so much more! We want to build life-giving relationships and impart the truths and the hope of the Gospel in a winsome and compelling way, leaving behind much more than buildings and special events.

If we go with the motivation, even sub-consciously, of convincing people that capitalism, representative government, technology, or higher education are the ultimate answers to their problems, then we may forfeit something more important: the opportunity to share with them the Life, the Truth, and the Way that only Christ offers.

This is also a good place to begin thinking intentionally about the differences between our ideas of “spiritual” and the ideas we may find in churches and ministries abroad. If we want to share the Gospel in practical, relational ways, we must give focused attention to our own biases and preferences. Are my ideas about appropriate clothing, “worship styles,” or drinking alcohol truly “Christian,” or are they just culturally Western and based on my preferences and traditions? And how might insistence on doing it our way get in the way of sharing essential truths?

It’s important, too, to be sensitive to those on our teams who might not be sure of where they are in their relationship with God and have honest questions about the claims of Christianity. You might assume that everyone who goes on a mission trip would have the same “mission,” but while forming or nurturing relationships with team members it might become apparent that they don’t share your beliefs or your certainty.

Of course, the trip is not the time for confrontation or long talks on apologetics. It’s more important to foster trust, an atmosphere where questions are welcome and answers are honest but gentle. Your team member’s search for the truth is just as important as that of a vulnerable child on the field.

As we work through issues like these, it’s crucial to set aside time before, during, and after the trip to meet with God, to receive His direction and prepare your heart for the growth He desires in you. Reading your Bible and praying, even when the schedule is hectic and time is short, will shape your entire experience and help you see your work through the lens of what God is doing in the world.

The devotionals in this handbook are designed to focus your mind and heart on the way God sees poverty, justice, the Gospel message—and our response in a hurting world. And the journaling pages are provided as a space to process your trip experience and record what God is teaching you during and after the trip.

No matter what kind of ministry your team will participate in, pay attention to the Biblical principles shared along the way. Attitude and actions will communicate those you come alongside, so be aware of the message your group is sending. As the team prepares, focus on Biblical priorities you long to share with people you encounter—love, humility, grace, and respect. These priorities will influence how the team members respond to people and circumstances during the trip, and you will discover that your lives will be a blessing to those you seek to serve.
Group Discussion and Personal Reflection:
Why Am I Going?

1. Do you have any fear or apprehension about going on this mission trip? If so, in what ways is He asking you to trust Him?

2. Sometimes it is easy to focus only on the logistical or ministry preparations for a mission trip and neglect preparing your own heart. What are some ways that you can prepare spiritually for your mission trip?

3. How would you respond to someone who suggests that going on a mission trip is a waste of money?

4. What are your personal goals for this mission trip? What are two things in your life and actions that you would like to be different as a result of this trip, even months or years from now?

5. Given the complexity of poverty and poverty alleviation, how can you specifically commit to make this trip one part of a long-term process of learning and engaging in God’s work, rather than a one-time spiritual or emotional experience?

Practical Team Preparation:
Passports, Immunizations, International Health

It’s getting real – and it’s time to start making the preparations to start our journey together! Following this first session, here are the items on your “To Do” list:

- **Passports** – All team members must have a valid passport to travel internationally. It’s recommended that your passport have at least six months remaining before expiration and two open pages for new stamps. Because it can take up to eight weeks to complete the process and this information might be needed to confirm your ticket with the airline, it’s important to get started immediately! For more information, visit www.travel.state.gov.

- **Immunizations** – Kids Alive encourages team members to use the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) website and follow your own physician’s recommendations to determine which immunizations are necessary for the country or countries where you’ll be traveling. It’s important to schedule an appointment for these 4-6 weeks before your departure date. Your primary care physician should be able to provide most if not all of your required immunizations; otherwise, your local health department may also be able to help, and sometimes at a reduced rate. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/travel.

- **International Health Insurance** – Every Kids Alive Service Team member must have health insurance coverage. If you need accident and health insurance coverage outside of the US (primarily used for emergency medical evacuation expenses) or you wish to purchase travel insurance, you may enroll in a temporary insurance package specifically for short-term service. Many churches and schools already include coverage for their team members and purchase a plan for the whole team, so check with your team leader before making an individual decision.

Although there are many options you can choose, Kids Alive is partnering with Insurance Consultants International to offer two different plans for our teams. For more information, visit www.missiontripinsurance.com/Kids-Alive/.