



# Crafting Mission Stories

## ***Listening, learning and reflecting before, during and after the trip***

What is the story you will tell about your mission trip or travel study seminar? Sharing about a cross-cultural service or learning experience helps other people learn about people and places with which they might be unfamiliar. What you say and the images you show can have a lasting impact on your listener or reader. Read this guide before you go and after you return to craft creative, engaging and thoughtful stories about your trip.

### **BEFORE the trip**

- Learn as much as you can about the people, their history, current events, context and culture. The more you know before you go, the more accurately you can interpret what you see, experience, feel and learn while you are there. Think about your purpose for going. See the Short-Term Mission Trip Workbook for helpful exercises for reflection.

### **DURING the trip**

- **Adopt a spirit of humble listening and learning.** Keep your ears, eyes, mind and heart open. Be a good observer of yourself and the people you are visiting. Be mindful that your own cultural values, worldview and life experience will impact what you see, hear, learn and feel. They will shape how you interpret the trip experience once you return home.
- **When taking photos, follow best practices:**
  - Consult with your trip leader or mission host to learn culturally appropriate practices for picture-taking.
  - Think about the purpose of taking a picture. Use common sense. Ask yourself what you want to show or tell people who are not with you on the trip by taking that picture. Ask yourself whether it will show respect for the local people.
  - Ask permission before taking a picture of a person.
  - Don't stay behind the camera. Staying behind your camera or having your phone out all the time can distance you from the experience and turn people into objects. Consider having one person in your group take pictures each day.
  - Keep a daily journal to record your experiences. Your journal will serve as a tool for personal reflection. At the same time, what you write may help you recall details, facts and feelings as you shape stories from the trip upon your return home.
- **Some ideas for journaling:**
  - Take note of new knowledge and insights.
  - Write down your feelings and experiences of “heartfelt connection” with people.
  - Journal about sights, sounds, smell and touch. Use all of your senses.
  - Write down questions, surprises and challenges.
  - Write down the names of people and places and, if need be, how they are pronounced.

## **Mission Toolkit: Short-Term Mission**

*Telling about your cross-cultural mission or learning experience is important. You have a unique experience to share that can change how others think about the world and — perhaps — inspire them to get involved, too. Be encouraged as you prepare to share your story with integrity, love and grace.*



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## AFTER the trip

### • Be humble and self-reflective.

- Speak about your personal perspective. A short trip in a community that is not your home and that does not share your culture does not make you the expert on that place. Consider saying, “What I observed...” or “What I understand...” instead of making general statements that sound like facts.
- Be specific about what you saw and heard. It is tempting to romanticize the people or the place you visited: “They have so little, but they are so happy!” “Their faith is so vibrant, even though life is so hard.” Instead of generalizing, tell about a specific moment or circumstance in which you saw someone showing resilience, heartbreak, faith, love or joy. If you do not have permission to tell someone’s personal story, change the details enough so that the person cannot be identified.

### • Steps for telling the story after the trip:

One of the best ways to engage an audience is by telling a good story that brings them with you to an experience you had during the trip. As you begin preparing a short talk about the trip, first reflect broadly about what you learned and experienced there. If you kept a journal or any notes, review them. Then follow these steps:

#### ◦ Identify the MAIN thing:

1. What do you want your audience to know?
2. What do you want your audience to feel?
3. What do you want your audience to do?

Take a couple of minutes to write one sentence each for the three “MAIN thing” questions.

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#### ◦ Which stories to tell?

Which stories can you tell to illustrate the MAIN thing? Note all of your story ideas below:

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*Record personal stories you hear from the people you meet. Ask them if you can share their stories.*



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## ◦ What is the purpose of these stories?

Consider the following questions for each of the story ideas:

1. How would the people you are writing about react if you were to share this story with them? Would they feel proud...honored...represented fairly... entertained...joyful...neutral...confused... uncomfortable...misunderstood... objectified...upset?
2. Which story idea do you think the people you are writing about would choose for you to tell others? How would they want you to tell the story?

Reflect on these questions, then make notes as needed on the story list.

Circle the story ideas on the list that you think would honor the dignity of the people you visited during the trip.

Now that you've reflected on the MAIN thing, why you want to tell about it, and which stories you think show respect for the people you are going to be talking about, choose ONE story to work with.

*In Medias Res* — Latin for “into the middle of things”

One way to tell a story effectively is to start in the middle. Your story opens in the midst of the plot to get your audience’s attention by starting right at the heart of things. For the story you’ve chosen, what is that “aha” moment... that point of no return... that moment you learned, saw, recognized... you were changed?

Come up with a sentence that puts your reader or listener right in the middle of that story.

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## • Examples of openers:

1. “We were in Ana’s kitchen standing next to the adobe stove, and she laughed with me as I tried to shape the corn dough into a round tortilla to put on the griddle.”
2. “We sat at the back of the church, the rain drumming on the metal roof, and I felt tears on my face as my new friend, James, prayed for me and my family.”

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*Be humble and self-reflective when sharing — even in informal conversations.*

## Notes:

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- **Go Easy on the Exposition**

Weave in just the important expository information through the action of the story. Come up with a second sentence that moves the story forward, and incorporate one or two bits of information that you feel are crucial to the story (i.e., your name, role, church's name, global partner's name, place of service, purpose of the trip, etc.). Examples of second sentences:

1. "Ana began sharing with me her story, and how she and her family have been able to stay in her home in Salinas Grande because of the community work with guidance from CEPAD that our congregation supports through prayer, visits and donations."
2. "I thought I was going to Malawi to do something for Malawians, but over the 10 days I was there, my understanding of mission was transformed."

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- **Consider the Story's Climax and Resolution**

What is the climax or turning point of the story? What is the resolution? Remember that we are a Resurrection people. If the resolution is not promising, where do you see God at work? Where do you find hope?

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- **Ending the Story**

When the story is over, simply pause. Let the audience sit with it for a moment.

- **Inviting Companions for the Journey**

Take a few minutes to finish the following prompts for the story you plan to tell. After you finish the prompts, decide which ones you'd like to include in your story, probably at the end:

1. What excites me right now about what this trip can mean for our church is...

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2. I'm reminded of the Scripture verse...

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3. One joy I had on this trip was...

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4. One challenge that I would ask you to pray about is...

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5. I invite you to come alongside me in God's mission through your prayers, your gifts, your commitment to joining our next trip, your...

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# Crafting Mission Stories

## Framing the Story

### Use an Engaging Start

How will you engage the audience at the outset of your talk?

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### Use a Strong Ending

What final words will you leave your listeners with to seal your MAIN message?

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## Ending Strong

After you've invited further engagement in God's mission, and perhaps you've had a chance to answer questions publicly, there are two important items to include as you conclude your talk:

- A warm "thank you" for your audience or reader. This could be a "thank you" for their interest, or their invitation to speak or write, or their support and prayers.
- A "remember this" closer

### 'Remember This' Closer

A strong talk includes a strong ending that brings the theme of your MAIN thing back into focus. It's the nugget, the cherry on top, that helps the audience walk away with a greater sense of the short-term mission trip or travel study seminar experience.

Your strong closer might take the following forms:

- Song
- Short poem
- Scripture verse
- Quote
- Challenge in the form of a question (How is God calling you/us to...?)

You might find that your explicit description of the impact on you and where that takes you next might work well here. Or you might want to restate your MAIN thing in a succinct manner. Are you continuing to struggle with new teachings? You could invite your audience to join the struggle. Have you decided the next steps for your life because of what you experienced? You could state that here. Whatever approach you take, be sure to bring back your MAIN thing and end with an arrow to the heart.

Take some time to consider a strong closing for your talk. These should be under 30 seconds. Try several ideas. Write them out or sound them out in your mind. Think of a few options.

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