



Envision Devotional



One: Look Up

CONNECT:

Welcome to the journey!

Whether this is your first or your tenth cross-cultural experience, we're glad you're here, and we're glad that we're walking in this together.

Based on your past experience (or lack thereof), you may have certain expectations and anxieties going into a trip like this. It can be a bit intimidating to think about ministering to others sometimes—we have our own insecurities, struggles, areas of weakness and fear. The good news is—God's got this. Only he can make you ready.

Before you leave for your trip, it's important to focus on looking UP so that you are spiritually ready for what is about to happen. It's easy to think about our own concerns, worries, and fears, especially when preparing for a big trip—to start to drift toward the mindset of self-reliance. But, your mind, body, and spirit actually can be in line with God's will. With his help, we can live out the commission he has given us—to bear fruit in every good work. Take these next couple days to prepare yourself . . . first up, we need to pray!

SCRIPTURE:

In Luke chapter 6 we see Jesus (God himself) carving out time to pray. Luke 6:12 says, "In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God."

This is how Jesus began his ministry. He prayed, then he prayed, and again prayed some more. Jesus knew that his effectiveness came from his Father. Jesus taught us to pray like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (Matthew 6:9–13) So in your preparation for your mission trip: pray, pray, pray.

REFLECT:

- Take time to reflect on God's goodness and provision so far.
- Where do you need God to reveal His will to you?
- What physical needs do you need to ask God to provide for?
- What do you need to be forgiven of?
- Who do you need to forgive?
- What temptations in your life do you need to be led away from?
- Spend time praying for the above. Write your thoughts down.

CHALLENGE:

Spend substantial time praying to God over your Envision experience, and lift up all of these things, along with your worries and anxieties, to God.

Two: Abide

CONNECT:

Have you listened to an apple tree before? Maybe when you were walking by you heard the sound of it straining, muttering under its breath, trying to make apples appear.

But that's pretty ridiculous. Apple trees don't talk first of all, and secondly, they don't really have to try to make apples. It's just what they do. They're made to bear fruit, and when they're healthy and growing, it just happens—and really without any effort on their part.

Even when they don't have apples on their branches, there's a lot going on beneath the surface—nutrients received from the roots, photosynthesis turning sunlight into fuel, new branches and buds that continue to spread. All of the processes foundational for fruit to actually happen. The apple tree just needs to stay rooted.

SCRIPTURE:

Read John 15:1–11.

Often times as Christians we feel pressure to “bear fruit.” We feel as if it's up to us to make it happen, or maybe even to have “something to show” to those around us. However, no matter how hard we try, or how many things are checked on our checklist, our game plan to bear lots of fruit will turn up empty every time unless we are abiding in Christ. “Apart from me, you can do nothing,” Jesus says.

Our mindset of self-reliance has to go. And when we let it go, spending time with Jesus and focusing on our life in him, the fruit comes naturally. Verses 7–8 say that if we abide in God, He, the God who made all things, will abide in us. If his life is in us, then we can do ministry as he did—abiding in the Father, and seeing fruit in ministry. Abiding is resting in Jesus. When we choose to make Him our first thought, our posture will naturally become obedience and trust, instead of striving and stress.

REFLECT:

- What does it look like to “abide” in Jesus?
- Think of times you felt distant from God.
 - How was your prayer life? How was your attitude toward others? Would you say your joy was full?
- Now think of times you have drawn close to God and answer the same three questions.
- Spend some time in prayer and just reflect on God's love for you. Dwell in this place of God's love. Spend time in the Word and then ask God to bear fruit in you—whether at your site or as a result. Submit your “expectations” of what this might look like, and rest in him. Write your thoughts down.

CHALLENGE:

Spend today in constant prayer, obedience, trust, and joy in God; loving others as he loves you.

Three: Be Still

CONNECT:

Think about what relaxes you the most. What is the ambience? The sounds? The surroundings? What are you doing? Maybe you are reading a book by a fire on a snowy day, maybe you're swinging in a hammock, or maybe you're sitting in a quiet kitchen with a fresh cup of coffee before anyone else gets up. Did you picture yourself at work, or perhaps in an argument? Probably not. When we're relaxing, we're normally not doing anything. We probably won't have anything to show for it afterwards, unless it's a sunburn.

Here's the thing: as Christians, we often find ourselves in a pattern of pouring out and being filled up. Sometimes, however, we forget to “fill up” and focus instead on doing doing doing. If we don't have something to show for it at the end, we can feel like the time spent was wasted. The truth is, if we aren't filling up, after a while we will have nothing to give. We'll be trying to pour out of an empty cup.

We can fill our cups in a lot of different ways. Some practical ways might be spending time with Jesus in prayer or worship, reading the Word, spending time in community with other believers, or even taking a Sabbath. We too frequently find ourselves doing too much, and we end up feeling drained, going into opportunities to serve or bless without feeling refreshed or ready to give. It is important to set aside time (or even choose a day) to actually rest in the Lord and be refreshed in him.

SCRIPTURE:

Take time to simply reflect on God's word. Read Psalm 46 slowly. Don't rush.

This is the God we are called to rest in. God, who created all things and has dominion over all things, is your fortress. When we take a moment to step back from the busyness of life and take time to abide in him, we remember that he is about his purposes in the world, and he is in control. Read verse 10 again. Now re-read the second part of it. It says to be still, but for what purpose? “I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth.” Sometimes we can get so overwhelmed with the task at hand, thinking we have to do everything in our own power—we have to make sure our ministry is a success. But if we take a step back and remember God is the one orchestrating all of this, that he will do his work, then we take the burden off of ourselves. It is our privilege to participate with him, in what he is already doing and will continue to do—and also to rest.

REFLECT:

- List 5 things that “fill you up”
- List 5 things that “drain you” or things that are stressful, discouraging, etc.
- Spend some time in prayer—but instead of talking the whole time, allow time for God to speak to you, or to reflect on who he is. Write your thoughts down.

CHALLENGE:

Spend a substantial amount of time quietly with the Lord. During this time, minimize distractions as much as possible (no TV, computer, phone)—nothing but you and your Bible. Listen to what God has to say.

Four: Confidence in God

CONNECT:

Are you sitting down? If not, take a seat.

When you sat in that chair, did you ask the chair if it would support you before sitting? Did you have a back-up plan in case it decided not to hold you? Of course not, and honestly that thought probably didn't even cross your mind. It has never failed you before, so of course you trust it. How many things in our day-to-day lives do we have full confidence in without ever giving it a second thought? We are confident that our watch will tell us the right time, that our mugs won't stop working and spill hot coffee, and we have confidence in other drivers that they won't run a red light. The fact of the matter is, we've seen these perform over and over again as expected, so there's really little doubt when we rely on them.

Do we have the same confidence in the God of the Universe? The One who Scripture tells us is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow? We trust the chair because it's never failed us, but why is it so hard for us to trust God in the same way? He's invisible, and sometimes seems far away, but He's never failed us. It might seem like it, but He hasn't. He hasn't left us. And He deserves our confidence.

SCRIPTURE:

Elijah was a prophet during the reign of King Ahab—easily one of the worst kings in Israel. The guy had to go. Elijah decided that the best way to do this would be to challenge Ahab, and he did it boldly. The deal was this: the Baal worshipers would present an offering, call to their god, and then Elijah would present an offering to the Lord. Whoever sent fire down from heaven and burned up the offering was the true God.

Read 1 Kings 18:26–29, & 36–39. When is the last time you showed God you believed in him fully? Really stuck your neck out there for him? Elijah called every false prophet in the area, over 850 people, all wanting to prove him wrong. If Elijah's plan didn't work they would've killed him on the spot; his life literally depended on his faith in God.

As you prepare to go to a your Envision site, what are your confidence levels like? You have the unique opportunity to see both God at work and participate with him; put your trust in God completely. Believe in God and what He can do! When you make your request known, do it with boldness. As Elijah said, “Answer me, O Lord!”

REFLECT:

- What area of your life do you take matters into your own hands, trying to control (or self-protect)? Do you feel something or some situation is “too important” to trust God with? What will it take to give this up to God?
- Spend some time in prayer. Ask God to reveal to you the places in your life where He wants in, and to show you how to let Him in. Write your thoughts and feelings down.

CHALLENGE:

Think of something you have been praying for. Pray with boldness, and believe with your whole heart that God will answer this prayer. And then act as if you do! If you're expecting rain, you'll be carrying an umbrella.

Five: Stories

CONNECT:

One source of entertainment that has stood the test of time is storytelling. People have been telling stories for thousands of years! Even before civilization started to document things, stories were passed along. People love stories. Storytelling is a way of life in many cultures; the people often most admired are those that are good storytellers. You maybe noticed that people in your host culture appreciated hearing from you and often weren't looking for just a one-word answer. While in church, the pastor may ask you to greet the congregation. They are not just asking for a smile and a wave—they want someone to share. What better way than with the story God has given you? This story could be how you came to know the Lord, or an impactful moment in your walk with God, even what made you feel called to come to their country. A good story from a guest can captivate the hearts of the people and God can use it for amazing things.

SCRIPTURE:

Read through Acts 26:1–23 and see how Paul shares a story.

The story Paul shares here is the story of how he surrendered his life to Christ. There are four parts to the story he shares: 1) He starts with who he was before knowing who Jesus was, and even confesses all the horrible things he did. 2) He tells of his first encounter with Jesus. 3) He includes what Jesus told him about the calling on his life. 4) He tells about his response to his encounter with Jesus—how his life changed and what he is doing now.

Jesus' story changes our story and he wants us to share that with others.

REFLECT:

- What is a story you can share? (You don't have to write the whole thing here)
- How is God involved in this story?
- What is the result of this story in your life now?
- Pray over this story and ask God to reveal even more through it to you now. Write your thoughts down.

CHALLENGE:

Whatever your story might be, write it out and practice making it between 5–7 minutes. Make sure no matter what the story is it involves you and it always points back to Jesus.

Six: Invite In

CONNECT:

Finally, all of the preparation is going to pay off! You're on the field—the processes are over, and you're here. You're working alongside a team, you have specific tasks to complete, and more than likely, you're eager to get to work!

Do you ever feel like it would be easier to just go yourself? You could get a lot more done, reach more people, and cover a lot more ground.

While sometimes this seems like the more efficient answer, that doesn't mean it's the right one. One common misperception of Western culture is that the task is more important than the relationship. We mistakenly believe that the goal is of utmost importance, instead of the people we're working alongside (or even ministering to). God's intention for us is not to "lone-wolf" it, getting a lot done, but potentially missing out on rich community and relationships in the process. By going it alone, we often miss out on opportunities to invest and/or receive from others, and to build toward the kingdom together, seeing the fruit of collective labor.

We've explored what it looks like to look UP to God, relying on his strength. What does it look like to invite others IN, especially in the context of a team?

SCRIPTURE:

Read Luke 6:13–16. Jesus had many followers at this point, but he chooses to invite in twelve specific members and call them his apostles. Even among the twelve, Jesus had his inner circle consisting of just three: Peter, James, and John.

Now, Jesus is God in human form. Did he really need their help? He, of all people, could make the claim that he was capable of doing it himself. But he didn't. He invited others in to work with him. A lot of these men would have different opinions about how to get things done—and gosh, it would be nice to just focus on the task and not have to worry about these time-sucking relationships that seem to "get in the way." But what if Jesus did it all on his own? Then there would be no one to carry out the mission after he left. Jesus invites others in to his mission because he wants to involve us. It's not just about the task—it's about developing others who can continue the work. Relationships are not a bother—they are a priority. By choosing to invest in the people we are ministering with, by working and learning together, we are choosing into something that goes further than just the task in front of us. We are developing and partnering with people who are going to continue Kingdom work.

REFLECT:

- Do you tend to be more task-oriented or relationship-oriented?
- How could you focus more on the relationships around you?
- What do you have to offer to those around you? (Where can you teach, encourage?)
- Spend some time in prayer ask God to lead you toward a few people to invite in. Write their names and your thoughts down.

CHALLENGE:

Whoever you feel God is leading you toward, begin strengthening that relationship and explore how you can invite them into God's work with you.

Seven: Know Yourself and Your Team

CONNECT:

So you might've picked up on the fact that you're different from those you're serving alongside. I don't what tipped you off—whether it was watching in fascination as someone created a well-known landmark out of their food, observing people's different reactions to tears, or noticing the problem-solvers come out of the woodwork to fix something that came up.

God's created us differently. While we're all created in His image, the particular reflection might look considerably different person to person. A part of God's creativity is your psychological breakdown. It is important both to know yourself—the way you operate and respond to things going on around you—as well as to understand those around you, and why they do, say, or feel the way they do.

A common personality test puts people in four categories: Feelers, Thinkers, Doers, and Creators. You can imagine, for example, how a feeler and a thinker would approach situations differently. The feeler might try to empathize with someone who shares a need, and the thinker might come up with solutions to try to fix the problem for their friend. People not only see things differently, but respond differently. Without a shared understanding and appreciation for the gifts of someone else, we can get hung up on how we think things should work.

SCRIPTURE:

Do the Scriptures support one type of "personality" over another? Read 1 Corinthians 12:4–6, and then verses 12–26. Look at what Paul has to say about different personalities within the Body.

Know who you are, and be confident in that. God has created you in a unique way for a unique purpose—you have a role to play and something to offer to those around you. Remember also those around you have been created in their own unique way. Though you may not always see eye to eye, or do things in the same way, understand you are all doing this for the same purpose and you all belong to the Lord.

REFLECT:

- Do you see yourself as a Feeler, Thinker, Doer, or Creator?
- What are your top three strengths, and how can they help your team on the field?
- Think of the personality types you struggle more to work with. What are some ways you can come alongside them to work together toward a goal?
- Pray to God and ask him to give you clarity in where you fit on the team. Ask him reveal to you specific ways he's created you and what you bring to the ministry. Also ask him to help you see the unique ways he's gifted those you are serving alongside. Write your thoughts down.

CHALLENGE:

Seek out opportunities to work with and learn from personalities that are different from you. Ask God to give you fresh eyes to see their unique giftings; look for opportunities to collaborate in a way that builds up those around you.

Eight: Flexibility

CONNECT:

After being in a new culture for even a few days, you might start to pick up on differences from your home culture. Meeting at 8:00 might actually mean 8:45; saying you're going to do one thing actually means you do something entirely different; plans are always changing, things are never set in stone, and every morning you wake up there's no telling what the day will hold. The key to surviving in a new culture is flexibility! As hard as it may be, you have to be completely flexible with every aspect of life because things are always changing.

Being flexible is not just a "go-with-the-flow" attitude. It goes so much further than just being OK with playing a game with kids instead of teaching a Bible story. To be truly flexible is to be content with any situation God puts in front of you and following where he would have you go, regardless. It takes obedience, boldness, and trust.

SCRIPTURE:

Read Philippians 4:11–13.

Paul experienced a lot over his years of ministry. He traveled all over the known world, ministering in a ton of different places and cultures. And everywhere he went, his experience looked a little different. His team, the culture, the people, the ministry, his ministry funds, his health, what he ate—these were all up in the air, not something he could depend on as he moved about from place to place. But yet Paul says that in every circumstance he has learned to be content. To be content is to be satisfied with what you have—not wanting more or something else instead. In verse 13 Paul states that no matter what, Christ gives him strength, Christ is who keeps him going. And not just in a "fake-it-til-you-make-it" sense, but because Christ becomes his source, the reason he can go on as he does. Leaning on our own strength can be exhausting. When Christ becomes our source of strength, we can say "yes" to our ever-changing circumstances, knowing that he will sustain us. Will we be content with having Christ?

REFLECT:

- What frustrations do you have with your current circumstances?
- How do you feel when things change in an instant?
- What adjustments can you make to adapt?
- Spend some time in prayer and pray over the things that frustrate you most, ask God to heal your heart and let him give you contentment in any situation. Write your thoughts down.

CHALLENGE:

Every time something changes unexpectedly, try to list three reasons why it is better than the original plan. You can just think of them or actually write them, or discuss them with someone.

Nine: Humility

CONNECT:

"Would you just give me my space?" "You are so annoying!" "Can't I just do this by myself!?"

While you might not find yourself saying these things out loud, the thoughts may have popped into your mind more than once. Things that may have seemed minor back at home now seem like a much bigger deal, especially when you're in a new environment having new experiences.

Before you left you would have never had these thoughts about someone, and now you feel guilty when these frustrations come up. It seems like whenever you're working with a new team, or in a new environment, stuff like this happens all the time! You and your fellow workers might work at different paces, prefer working alone, have different personalities, or have different ideas about how to do things. These differences can be so valuable to have on a team, but also can cause major division.

SCRIPTURE:

Read Philippians 2:1–8 about humility, especially in relationship to others.

Think about the frustrations you may have with someone. Now consider what Paul writes here. Would the problems you are having be answered by anything said there? Did you ever think that maybe there are things you are doing that frustrate others around you? To humble yourself, you have to take a step back and put things in perspective. You may look at frustrating situations with a microscope, but when you step away from the microscope and see everything that is going on in the ministry, you'll see these problems are really small. If everyone works together and has like minds to see Kingdom change, the tensions of different personalities are not something to get hung up on, but instead something to use to your advantage.

REFLECT:

- How would you describe your personality?
- What are the pros of your personality? What are the cons?
- Discuss what it means to be of "one spirit and of one mind" with those around you. Are you striving for that?
- How can you better work together to accomplish this goal?
- In what areas do you need to humble yourself to consider others more important than yourself?
- Spend some time in prayer. Ask God to reveal to you where you need humility, and ask him to give your team the same like-mind. Write down your thoughts.

CHALLENGE:

Challenge yourself to seek humility today, see how others react and see how they are humbling themselves. Then explore how you felt about humbling yourself and how others felt when you did.

Ten: Discipline

CONNECT:

Remember when you were a little kid and you heard the phrase, “Wait until your father gets home!” How about the first time you were grounded? Your only activity was throwing a tennis ball against the wall until the constant thud drove your parents insane. Or if you were unlucky enough: detention. All these things, in the moment, seem like the worst form of torture known to man. But in all honesty, once it’s over, you don’t even think twice about it. You learn from your mistakes so you don’t have to go through it again. That’s discipline.

God also disciplines us spiritually. It’s not punishment, or something that should put an unhealthy fear in our hearts toward God. But at the same time, it is often a painful and difficult process to go through. It’s easy to look at hard circumstances in our lives and think “God is punishing me for this or that,” but that’s not the heart behind the Lord’s discipline in our lives.

SCRIPTURE:

Read through Hebrews 12:5–11 and see how the author explains the purpose behind discipline.

When your parents disciplined you, it was not to be mean—it was meant to shape you into someone better. When you go through spiritual disciplines, it’s not because God wants to make your life miserable. It’s meant to draw you closer to God, to make you look more like him. You see the good results of it by the fruit of righteousness in your life and the peace you have with others. When we see the benefits of it, it’s easier for us to press in during times we feel we’re under the Lord’s discipline, instead of drawing back or feeling as though God is against us.

REFLECT:

- Are there areas in your life where you feel the Lord is disciplining you?
- What do you need to do to come under his discipline?
- How do you deal with discipline? Do you lean into it, or do you shy away from it?
- Pray and ask God to work in this area of your life. Let him teach you what the underlying reason behind these disciplines are. Write your thoughts down.

CHALLENGE:

Make a plan for while you are here to begin this discipline, and how you can continue after you return home. Get an accountability partner and work on this together.

Eleven: Be Bold

CONNECT:

The more time you spend doing ministry in a new culture, the more you realize you are constantly being pushed out of your comfort zone. This is a difficult process, and that’s how it’s supposed to be. Being repeatedly put in situations that make you a little unsure causes you to grow in confidence and boldness. A driving factor that will try to keep you in your comfort zone is fear. Fear of stepping out, fear of rejection, fear of failure. The good news is fear has no power over you. You are a new creation, redeemed by the Holy Spirit, and because of that you can boldly walk forward with all confidence in Christ. So when you are standing in front of someone and you feel the Spirit telling you to give that encouraging word, just go for it! Even if you don’t know what to say, allow God to speak through you and take yourself out of the equation. Don’t let fear keep you in your small comfort zone, but instead allow God to draw you out, growing your boldness in him.

SCRIPTURE:

Read Acts 4:23–31.

Peter and John have just been beaten by the Sanhedrin for talking about Jesus, warned not to do it again, are returning to the community of believers. It’d be easy for them to react in fear to all of this—after all, what if they get beaten again? Their actual response is incredible—it’s prayer.

They begin praying by remembering who is ultimately in control of all things, who is over these people who are making threats against them. And then they ask the Lord, not for protection, but for courage to speak the Word of God with boldness, and for the Lord to do miracles, signs and wonders (which is a bold prayer)! The Holy Spirit shows up, the place is shaken, and they go out and continue to speak boldly about Jesus.

REFLECT:

- What kinds of things pull you out of your comfort zone? (i.e. talking to new people, sharing your testimony, etc.)
- What are you afraid of in these situations?
- When reading the Acts passage, what stood out to you?
- Spend some time praying for boldness. If there are specific things for which you need prayer, ask someone to pray with you. Write your thoughts down.

CHALLENGE:

Look for opportunities to lean into situations that would normally cause you to fear—say a prayer for boldness, then tackle them with confidence in Christ!

Twelve: Saying Goodbye

CONNECT:

You're nearing the end of your journey—possibly faster than you expected. Saying goodbye may not be a particularly fun activity for you, but it can be one of the most impactful parts of your experience. Try and remember some of the goodbyes you have had in the past. A lot of times they are sad, difficult, and honestly, it's hard to know what to say! Our responses can be totally different from one another—some people drag it out as long as possible, and others will try to slip out quietly without trying to make a big deal about it. And while it's often uncomfortable, saying goodbye is a very important part of finishing well. You have had an awesome experience with many new friends, but now it's coming to a close and it's unclear what the next steps are, for your faith, for these new friendships, for what life will look like afterwards.

SCRIPTURE:

Paul did a lot of traveling during his life—which also meant saying a lot of goodbyes, to people he had known for maybe just a few days, and those he had invested in over several years. Read Acts 20:25–38.

In this instance, Paul is saying goodbye to the Ephesian elders, those he is leaving in charge of the ministry. This is a great example of a farewell that would leave the elders there encouraged. Paul recognized the fact that he probably won't ever see these people again because he knew wherever he went there was a chance he wouldn't return. Instead of shying away from that fact in fear of it, he recognizes it as a moment that the elders would be very attentive to what he has to say.

REFLECT:

- How do you normally handle goodbyes?
- What makes leaving hard? What is exciting about leaving?
- What did you notice about Paul's final words to the Ephesian elders?
- How can you leave and encourage those who will continue in the ministry?
- Spend some time and prayer and simply lift up those individuals to God. Pray for protection, wisdom, and endurance for those you have grown close to. Write your thoughts down.

CHALLENGE:

Do not shy away from the goodbyes, but use them as your last opportunity for God to work through you to encourage those you have been building relationships with.

Thirteen: Go Out

CONNECT:

Welcome home!

You might be ecstatic to be back, or you might be wishing you were still at your Envision site. No matter where you're at, returning home can be difficult and disorienting. You should be prepared to face some challenges when you return.

It's pretty normal to find frustrations as you come back, with your home culture, and even with your family and friends, but it doesn't have to paralyze you. There's a new "normal" you can move toward, with new appreciations, maybe some new disciplines, and new perspectives. We have explored what it looks like to Look UP and Invite IN, now the last piece to the triangle is to Go OUT.

You have been on an incredible journey, and because of the experiences you've had, you will never be the same. You've had a chance to see God at work in the world (likely on a much larger scale than before) and more than that, you've had a chance to participate with him. Now that you are back, you have a decision to make: Do you go back to the way things were before, or do you continue to take steps of obedience, even now, even here at home?

God wants you to take what you have learned and bring it to where you are NOW.

SCRIPTURE:

Read John 4:28–30, then 39–42.

Jesus has just finished speaking with a Samaritan woman. She's changed by their time together—and she runs off to tell everyone she knows! To give you a little background on this woman, she had been married several times, and was now living with a man to whom she was not married. Her reputation was not the best. But when we read verses 39–42, people are curious! This woman, who had a bad reputation, was telling them about Jesus and they could see that something was different. She had been changed. And because she shared this so eagerly and freely with others, they also became curious about Jesus and many believed because of her testimony. When we share (and others see) the transformation in us, it encourages them to know Christ and to grow deeper with him!

REFLECT:

- What new frustrations are you faced with being back?
- What new appreciations do you have?
- This may be difficult, but not everyone is going to want to hear the long version of what your experience was like.
- Write a three-sentence answer to the question, "How was your time in _____?"
- Now write a one-sentence answer.
- Spend some time in prayer and just ask God to give you a sense of peace with being back home. Write your thoughts down.

CHALLENGE:

Joyfully tell three people about what God is doing in the city or country you just came from. Key word: Joyfully!

Fourteen: Renewed Mind

CONNECT:

Have you ever made a New Year's resolution before?

New Year's can be a great opportunity to turn over a new leaf. However, most people have pretty pessimistic expectations for the so-called "resolutions" that people make. The first couple days, weeks, maybe even month go really well, but then this strange phenomenon happens, and it's easy to slip back into old patterns. Like a New Year's resolution, you may have noticed yourself slipping back into habits you had before your trip—despite your desire to start new habits, disciplines, or lifestyle changes. Frustration follows, and it seems like it's impossible to actually change.

SCRIPTURE:

Romans 12:1–2 says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

You are not the person you used to be. However, this is not something we can force by human effort. It requires us submitting to the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Titus 3:5 says, "He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." Our posture should be submitting to God, asking his renewal and change to play out in our lives. What we've seen and learned from this time, we can ask him to grow in us.

REFLECT:

- What new disciplines did you form while serving at your Envision site?
- What old habits are you hoping to kick?
- What are practical steps you can take to walk in these new patterns?
- Ask God to reveal the takeaways that he wants to "stick", and also the patterns in your life that he wants to change. Write your thoughts down.

CHALLENGE:

Make yourself a "Renewed Mind Resolution". Write it on an index card and put it somewhere you will see it every day. Pray over it every time you see it and live it out with the help of the Spirit.

Fifteen: The Mission

CONNECT:

Now what? This is a pretty normal question to ask after a cross-cultural experience. You prepared for months, and the time spent on the field probably flew by. Now you're back, and it feels like everything has come to a halt. The next step is no longer laid out for you—and may not even be the same for each member of your team. What do you do next—are there specific steps? If so, what are they?

SCRIPTURE:

Read Matthew 28:16–20. Jesus' disciples felt similarly. After spending three years with Jesus, witnessing his death and resurrection—Jesus leaves them with a few last words, then ascends into heaven. His next step for them is plain: make disciples. No parables, no metaphors, no imagery this time. Everything they've seen him do, they are to imitate and teach to others.

What does discipleship look like? There are probably some myths about what discipleship is. Probably the most common image that comes to mind is meeting for coffee over an open Bible, having deep theological conversation about pre-destination, or something of the sort. Not that this isn't discipleship, as this is a great relational activity, but how does it compare to Scripture, to how Jesus related to his disciples? Now think about your own experience at your Envision site—you have had the opportunity to not only watch full-time workers, but to participate alongside them. What did you learn?

A quote from Benjamin Franklin reads, "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn." While Ben might not have realized it, this rings true for discipleship too. As you have been involved, now you are to involve others. As Jesus lived his life alongside twelve men that he disciplined, we should also bring others alongside us to learn from our lives, to participate with us. This isn't something that only happens in a missions setting. It can happen where you are right now. We can do this by sharing life with those around us, setting an example by our actions and words and inviting others to join us in this. This is discipleship—whether it is calling others to step out in risk with us, debriefing experiences together, sharing stories with them, celebrating triumphs, or walking in obedience together.

REFLECT:

- What has been your experience with discipleship? (Are you discipling someone, have you been disciplined before?)
- What does discipleship look like? (Distinguish between maybe the Christian cultural perception of "discipleship" and how Jesus trained his disciples)
- Read Acts 8:29–31 then read 1 Peter 5:2–5. What are your thoughts on these two passages?
- Spend time in prayer and ask God to put at least one person in your life that you can invest in. If you do not feel ready for that, then pray for someone older to be put in your life and invest in you. Write your thoughts down.

CHALLENGE:

Within the next month seek out this person, and begin to disciple them.

Sixteen: Obedience

CONNECT:

Do you remember the day when you realized you could finally reach the cookie jar?

All you had to do was drag a chair over to the counter, climb up on the counter, and by standing on your tippy toes, you could reach the cookie jar just enough to pull it down. With this knowledge, there were two choices: You could go for the cookie jar (hopefully without Mom or Dad walking in), or you could refuse, even though you were able to. Choosing to be obedient, in this moment, would be not getting into the cookies, even though you are tempted (and able) to do so. And this is often a difficult decision.

Obedience to God can look similar. We have our own desires that sometimes war against what we know God wants us to do. (To be in tune with what He desires, we need to be in his word and in prayer.) Often times it feels like we have enough information to say “This is best” or to justify a certain move on our part—all the while God may be asking us to wait, or to trust walking in obedience to him in another way. It’s tough to trust that he has the big picture, and our best in mind. After all—Mom and Dad don’t want us to spoil dinner, or to overeat and get an upset stomach. Our heavenly Father also has our best and his purposes in mind—and this might not be something that we have the wisdom to see or understand. Every time we walk in obedience, we are saying “Yes” to his purposes, submitting to his perspective, and choosing faith over fear or control.

When you get past your own desires and temptations, you make room for God to take control and guide you toward the man or woman he is creating you to be.

SCRIPTURE:

1 Samuel 15:1–29.

Saul is commanded by the Lord to completely destroy everything of the Amalekites. However, he doesn’t, and Samuel calls him out on it. His disobedience stemmed from two things mentioned—Saul is no longer “small in his own eyes” and he was afraid of the people (15:24). Because of his pride, to think that he knew best, and because of his fear of man, he chose not to walk in obedience to the Lord’s command. He tries to justify this by offering sacrifices from the spoil kept, but this does not please the Lord. “To obey is better than sacrifice,” Samuel says. Our obedience is what pleases the Lord—not what we think we can do for him. Choosing faith over fear is hard, but in our obedience we can submit to him, trusting he knows best and is ultimately in control.

REFLECT:

- In what ways are you seeking out God and His will?
- What would it look like in your life right now to be obedient to God?
- What things are in your life that keeps you from obeying God?
- Spend time in prayer asking God where he is guiding you. Write your thoughts down.

CHALLENGE:

Lean into whatever it is you feel God is pushing you toward and see what obedience to him can do.



ENVISION

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