



# MISSIONS TRAINING CURRICULUM

*Revised January 2017*

## Introduction

Welcome to VRBC's missions education process. This process is designed to help you serve more effectively and to engage more deeply the experience you will have. Over the next few weeks/months, you will be moving through several steps that we have put in place to help prepare you for your trip, spiritually, theologically, and practically.

This process will involve reading, researching a bit, and watching a few videos. These will be followed by a series of reflection questions and we hope the interaction with this material will help you (1) share insights and learning with fellow trip participants and (2) to remain accountable to one another for your learning. Also as part of each section, we will expose you to a new spiritual discipline.

We hope that whether or not you decide to go on the trip that you would complete the process. The reality is that the communities in which we live (Coppell, Valley Ranch, and beyond) are as much a mission field as other places around the globe. The skills necessary to engage in missions there are the same as here at home.

This process will take time and effort. It is our desire to aid, equip, and guide you so that you can serve God as called. Please feel free to call or e-mail at any time during this process. We commit to serve you with the best of our abilities. Let's begin!

### A Word on Format

This mission trip training curriculum is designed to be discussed with your mission trip team over a series of three training meetings in advance of your trip. We invite you to prepare for each of these meetings by reading and doing the content in advance and coming prepared to discuss these with your team. At your first meeting, you will discuss Part 1: Mission(s) and Evangelism. At your second meeting, you will discuss Part 2: Culture and Context. At your third meeting, you will discuss Part 3: Evangelism Continued, as well as trip-specific orientation details such as flights, what to pack, and other important details to help you prepare for your trip.

This training is designed to take you to the next level of missions preparation, whether it is your first mission trip or whether you have been on many trips before. If this is your first time to complete this particular mission trip training course, you are only required to read the two required readings for each Part. Each is a short article or a single chapter of a book, so your reading should not require much time. Still, they are designed for personal reflection, so please do not save this assignment until the night before your mission trip training meeting.

Each section provides a short introduction to the content. For those wishing to delve more deeply into the topics raised here, each subsection will have additional resource suggestions. If you have completed this training previously, you may wish to review the required readings, but we encourage you to explore some of the other readings in each section to enhance your knowledge and training.

Required and recommended readings and other web resources are available at: <http://vrbc.net/mission-trip-training>.

## Part 1: Mission(s) and Evangelism

In this section, we will begin to unpack the terms: mission, missions, Gospel, and evangelism. These are terms that we use often in our Christian circles, but what do we mean when we say them? If we are going on a "mission trip," then what exactly is our mission?

The hope of this section is to provide a measure of clarification on these terms to help us to better understand what it is we are doing when we engage in missions.

### To-Do:

1. Write down your own definitions of (1) mission and (2) evangelism (below). We'll come back to these at the end of the section.
2. Look at the spiritual exercise for this section. Try it out and reflect on your experience in the space provided.
3. Respond to the discussion questions in the 'Mission(s)' and 'Evangelism' subsections to follow.

### Mission:

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### Evangelism

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**Spiritual Exercise – *Lectio Divina*\***

CHOOSE a text of the Scriptures that you wish to pray. It makes no difference which text is chosen, as long as one has no set goal of “covering” a certain amount of text: the amount of text “covered” is in God’s hands, not yours.

PLACE YOURSELF in a comfortable position and allow yourself to become silent. Some Christians focus for a few moments on their breathing; others have a beloved “prayer word” or “prayer phrase” they gently recite in order to become interiorly silent. For some the practice known as “centering prayer” makes a good, brief introduction to praying the scriptures. Use whatever method is best for you and allow yourself to enjoy silence for a few moments.

THEN TURN to the text and read it slowly, gently. Savor each portion of the reading, constantly listening for the “still, small voice” of a word or phrase that somehow says “I am for you today.” Do not expect lightening or ecstasies. In praying the scriptures God is teaching us to listen to Him, to seek Him in silence. He does not reach out and grab us; rather, He softly, gently invites us ever more deeply into His presence.

NEXT TAKE the word or phrase into yourself. Memorize it and slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories and ideas. Do not be afraid of “distractions.” Memories or thoughts are simply parts of yourself which, when they rise up while praying the scriptures, are asking to be given to God along with the rest of your inner self. Allow this inner pondering, this rumination, to invite you into dialogue with God.

THEN, SPEAK to God. Whether you use words or ideas or images or all three is not important. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. And give to Him what you have discovered in yourself during your experience. Experience yourself as the priest that you are. Experience God using the word or phrase that He has given you as a means of blessing, of transforming the ideas and memories, which your pondering on His word has awakened. Give to God what you have found within your heart.

FINALLY, SIMPLY rest in God’s embrace. And when He invites you to return to your pondering of His word or to your inner dialogue with Him, do so. Learn to use words when words are helpful, and let go of words when they no longer are necessary. Rejoice in the knowledge that God is with you in both words and silence, in spiritual activity and inner receptivity.

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## Mission(s)

Whether you are 15 or 50, you were born into one of the greatest periods of Christian missions. You likely do not know a Christianity unconcerned with reaching the world for Christ. Surely there are persons, pockets, and even denominations less concerned than others, but nevertheless, the last 200 years witnessed a monumental surge in Christians endeavoring to share Christ with the world. (For more info, see 'William Carey' and/or 'Modern Missionary Movement.')

The trend continues. In 1965, only 540 Americans were involved in short-term missions. In 2013, 1.5-2 million Americans participated in a short-term mission trip. Spending billions of dollars on short-term missions each year invites us to consider, "What is 'mission'?"

What we will provide here is one way to consider answering that question. Hopefully, it will be helpful, but it will not be exhaustive. First, you may have noticed that at times we have chosen to place 's' in parentheses. Some make a distinction between mission (singular) and missions (plural). A simple way to distinguish the two is that mission involves God's action and missions is our, the Church's, action. Theologically, we understand that God is always on mission, reaching out and reconciling his creation to himself. God has invited the Church to participate with him in this mission and the various ways in which we respond (social action, sharing the Gospel, healing, etc.) denote the plural missions.

**REQUIRED READING:**

Jonathan Brink, "Missio Dei – A Philosophy of Ministry"

Brink’s article speaks of the broken relationships that plague this world. It is important to look at the whole of God’s redemption and to acknowledge that our mission, as agents of God’s kingdom, is to work for holistic redemption of the world around us. Across the testaments, we see God at work to redeem the social order, to dismantle corrupt economic structures, and to provide spiritual reconciliation. All of these work together to provide the fullness of God’s salvation. (see Wright, “God’s Model of Redemption” in *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*).

We, therefore, must strive at the social, economic, and spiritual level if we are to participate in God’s mission.

**Each mission trip has some or all of these goals in common (social, economic, or spiritual development). On which of these is your trip most focused?**

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**We fail as a community on mission when we ignore the social and economic needs of individuals and only seek to provide spiritual redemption. Likewise, we fail when we only address social concerns without addressing spiritual needs. How do we balance the two?**

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**Further reading and resources:**

Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*

Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World*

International Bulletin of Missionary Research  
(internationalbulletin.org)

N.T. Wright "Surprised by Hope" (RightNow Media Resource)

## Evangelism

In the previous subsection, we learned of God's mission as redemption, reconciliation, and restoration of his creation to himself. This is good news! We should tell someone. We should tell everyone!

God's redemptive action is the heart of the gospel (good news). The Old Testament reveals that long before Christ came, God was at work to redeem his people. As the New Testament Church, we have received our full redemption in Christ and await our ultimate restoration through the resurrection. In the meantime, however, God allows us to participate in his merciful and gracious action and through sharing the proclamation of this goodness to the world. In the simplest of terms, evangelism is sharing the gospel. Evangelism may be accomplished through word, deed, or both.

In a later section, we'll look more closely at the *how* of evangelism. Here, we'll dig a bit further into the *what* and the *who* of the gospel.

### REQUIRED READING:

John P. Bowen, "What is the Gospel?"

**Do you agree with the author's summary of the gospel as centering on Jesus, human need of Jesus, the promise of benefits from trusting Jesus, and a challenge to respond to Jesus? If someone who asked you what Christianity was all about, how would you answer?**

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**What is the gospel according to you? In what ways is Jesus good news in your life?**

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Look back at your definition of mission(s) and evangelism. How would you change them? What would you add/subtract?

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**Further reading and resources:**

John P. Bowen, *Evangelism for "Normal" People*

Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Salt Shaker & Into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life*

Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*

Brad J. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age*

Paul W. Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner, eds. *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church*

**History of Missions**

Missions strategy has taken many forms throughout the two millennia of Christianity. The article below provides a very brief overview (and critique) of how Christians have pursued missions in the past.

**This is not required reading, but is helpful for those who have the time.**

**Recommended Reading:**  
R. Pierce Beaver, "The History of Mission Strategy"

**Further reading and resources:**

David J. Bosch, *Transforming Missions: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (A Reader's Guide to Transforming Mission is a condensed and more accessible treatment of Bosch's book.)*

Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*

Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion*



## A Note About Serving the Poor

Unless you are relatively new to church, most of us have heard the parable that Jesus told of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10). You remember the context—an expert in the law wanted to test (or trick) Jesus by asking what was necessary to get eternal life. Jesus asked what the Scriptures had to say about it and the law expert quoted from Deuteronomy, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” Jesus replied, “You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.” The lawyer wanted off the hook, so he tried to justify himself by asking, “And who is my neighbor?” To which Jesus responded with a story of a Jewish man who was severely beaten and left for dead on the side of the road. All of the religious people passed by without helping, certainly all with solid and even religious-sounding excuses. A Samaritan—the enemy of the Jews—stopped and spent much of his time and resources to care for this man’s needs. It’s a familiar story, right? And there is a lot we can learn from this story.

But here’s the question we don’t always ask—when the lawyer asks what is required for eternal life, why doesn’t Jesus say, “Receive me as your personal Savior,” or something to that effect? We know that the way to salvation is not through the performance of good deeds. So what’s the story about? Consider the following:

Mercy to the full range of human needs is such an essential mark of being a Christian that it can be used as a test of true faith. Mercy is not optional or an addition to

being a Christian. Rather, a life poured out in deeds of mercy is the inevitable sign of true faith.

- Excerpted from Tim Keller’s *Ministries of Mercy*, p. 35

In other words, a heart and mind totally submitted to and absorbed in Christ alone will necessarily result in all Christians actively engaged in meeting the needs of others, with all the speed, the eagerness, the energy, and the joy with which we meet our own (Lev. 19:18). Not only is serving others a priority of the church, it is a priority of every Christian.

But most of us were not trained in Christian social work. We are easily overwhelmed by the magnitude of need we see around us. We don’t know how to fix the problems in our own lives, much less the individual and systemic problems in our communities. And how does this relate to sharing the gospel of salvation in Christ? We need a greater biblical understanding of poverty and of what we can and should do—as individuals and as a church—to alleviate poverty. Many of our mission trips will be in locations with a high percentage of material poor people. When our work there addresses these needs, our desire is to alleviate poverty without unintentionally hurting the poor and ourselves.

## Part 2: Culture and Context

In this section, we reflect on how culture and context play into our missions and evangelism.

The goal of this section is to help you consider how the location and people group you are encountering affect how you will minister.

### To-Do:

1. Look at the spiritual exercise for this section. Try it out and reflect on your experience in the space provided.
2. Read the subsections to follow and complete the research project to help you incorporate the themes of culture and context with your upcoming trip.

## Spiritual Exercise – *The Daily Examen*

“O LORD, you have searched me and known me.” Psalm 139:1

Essentially, the Prayer of Examen is a prayer practice that helps us become more attentive to God's presence and action in our lives. It also helps us to consciously reflect on and acknowledge the events, experiences, and feelings of one's day. There are several ways to practice this prayer, but one very simple method is provided below:

1. Become aware of God's presence. – Settle in with a bit of silence and quiet reflection, waiting upon God.
2. Review the day with gratitude. – Think about where you have seen evidence of God and give thanks. Think about where you have seen the presence of Christ and give thanks.
3. Pay attention to your emotions. – What are the events that triggered your emotions? At what point during the day were you happy, sad, angry, scared, and confused? Pray for clarity around these moments.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it. – What moment captured your imagination or your concern? Pray from this moment and for this moment.
5. Look toward tomorrow. – What are you anticipating from God as you get ready in body, mind and spirit for tomorrow? Pray for this moment or moments.

## Culture

In Western cultures one is taught quite early in life to eat with a spoon and fork; to eat with one's fingers would be "primitive" and "savage." However, Western peoples forget their own principles when they eat olives, popcorn, or peanuts; they eat such food with their fingers. Similarly, there seems to be nothing improper in eating a sandwich or a hamburger with one's hands rather than on a plate with knife and fork—yes, very much like "primitives" and "savages." As Indonesians like to put it: "You Westerners are the primitives and savages: you haven't the foggiest idea who had your fork in his mouth last. We're different; we don't have the slightest doubt about whose fingers were in our mouths last."

There is sometimes very little logic and consistency in culture. Germans are shocked and nauseated to see Americans eat sweet corn on the cob. Isn't that, after all, what one feeds to chickens, horses, and pigs? Americans, in turn, find it difficult to see how Germans can regard seasoned but absolutely raw ground beef as a delicacy. Isn't that what they feed lions? And how can Germans eat their bacon "raw"? . . .

Most people would be shocked, not to say nauseated, to see how some Melanesians season their pork; the chef, during the process of roasting a pig, will chew ginger and salt and spit this seasoning on the meat. (What is overlooked is the fact that the seasoning is sterilized in the fire.) The acceptable way to knead dough in some isolated areas of Europe until rather recent times was to

tread on it; and it is also easier to crush grapes for wine and cabbage for sauerkraut with the feet. That's how they make the tastiest sauerkraut.

from Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, pp. 182-3

When you engage in mission, whether you're approaching your neighbor across the street or those you will meet on your trip, you are crossing cultures. The examples noted above reveal just how different our cultures can be when it comes to food. Foods we might find odd or revolting are often common staples of another culture's diet. If you're headed to Peru, check out *cuy*; Guatemala, try *zompopos de mayo*; Kenya, *ugali*. But, our cultures encompass far more than food! Our culture tells us how to live, what's important, and what's good and bad. When we cross cultures, we confront different ideas and answers to grand questions of life. We might even find people asking completely different questions, ones we may not have considered.

Knowing the culture and the place we find ourselves (context) is extremely important to our missions and evangelism efforts. This section will expose you to some of the issues of culture and context while asking you to begin learning the culture and context of where you will be going. Along the way, you might come to know yourself better as you begin to think critically about your own culture.

### REQUIRED READING:

Paul G. Hiebert, "Cultural Differences and the Communication of the Gospel"

**How should Christianity relate to culture?**

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**Should Christianity look different in different cultures?**

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**How does your culture (e.g. American, middle-class, educated) influence your understanding of Christianity?**

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**Further reading and resources:**

Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology*, 1988 or newer

Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*

H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*

## Context

G. Campbell Morgan used to tell of the man who followed a method of Bible Study that is unfortunately quite prevalent. This man randomly opened his Bible, pointed to a verse, and read, "Judas went out and hanged himself." Finding these words unhelpful, the man tried again. This time he found "Go, and do thou likewise." In desperation he tried once more and this time the words that jumped at him were, "That thou doest, do quickly."

What is happening here? The man is reading the Bible verses paying no attention to context. Perhaps someone has misquoted you, failing to provide the context in which your statement was made. It can be frustrating, if not infuriating! In the context of a classroom, you might raise your hand to ask a question. Would you do the same in the middle of a sermon? No! Context matters!

When we read the Bible, it is important to understand that it is from a culture and a context not our own. To read it well, we then must seek to understand the culture and context of the Bible, its authors, and its peoples. The same holds true for our ministry across cultures.

We've touched on culture in the previous subsection. Here, we'll look at context a bit more. However, the issues of culture and context are quite intertwined. A context often speaks to or helps to determine a culture. For example, in Texas we eat a lot of beef. In Japan, on the other hand, seafood is the primary source of protein. Our weather also stipulates appropriate clothing and therefore a cultural expectation. Similarly, our historical context determines what

is acceptable. Women wearing skirts is quite common these days, but a hundred years ago it would've been scandalous no matter the heat!

### RECOMMENDED READING:

David J. Hesselgrave, "The Role of Culture in Communication"

Tom A Steffen, "Why Communicate the Gospel through Stories?"

**Continue to the 'Research Project' on the following page.**

## Research Project

So far, you've gathered a bit of insight into what missions, evangelism, and the gospel are. As you've read, culture and context are important. Thus, to engage in mission we need to be informed of the culture and context of those to whom we will be sent, with whom we will share, and alongside those whom we will minister. Now, we move from concept to application. Here, you will take your learning and do a bit of research that will equip you for your trip.

1. Read the Wikipedia page for your country (and/or region/people group). Reflect on your readings, how the country/culture differs from your own, and note questions or issues which might arise when thinking about ministry within this context/culture.
2. Locate a second source of information on your host country/culture, share it with the group, and note any relevant information. These might be anything from a book, a magazine article, or an encyclopedia entry.
3. Research the history of Christianity and missions in your country/region or among your people group. Determine if it is a new phenomenon or if Christianity is ingrained into the culture. What lessons have been learned?
4. Answer the following question: What might a culturally appropriate Christianity look like?

**Compile your notes, answers, and learning into a one to two page document and share with fellow group participants.**

## Part 3: Evangelism continued

So far, we've read and discussed the theology behind missions and evangelism. We hopefully have a solid foundation for what those terms involve. We have also looked at how culture and context play into cross-cultural ministry.

Now, we marry our previous discussions with practical teaching on the 'how' of evangelism. We move from how God has worked in the Bible and in history, to more concretely how God has worked in our lives.

When you think of your testimony and how you might communicate the things which you have seen and heard, think about how issues of culture and language may affect its hearing by those with whom you will share.

### To-Do:

1. Look at the spiritual exercise for this section. Try it out and reflect on your experience in the space provided.
2. Review the resources on evangelism.

## Spiritual Exercise - The Breath Prayer

Paul exhorts us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). But how do we do that? One ancient prayer practice allows us the opportunity to make prayer a part of our daily life - the breath prayer. Developing a breath prayer is very easy. You need to choose a prayer sentence. Here are some examples:

- O Lord, come to my assistance.
- God, make haste to help me.
- Lord Jesus, have mercy.
- Abide in my love.
- My God and my all.
- My Jesus, mercy.
- My Lord and my God.
- Lord, increase my faith.
- Not my will but yours be done.
- Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.

You could also turn to a familiar scripture passage or create one on your own. Imagine Jesus standing before you, asking, "What do you want? What do you seek from me?" Respond with the first thing that comes to your mind. Write this down. Next, choose your favorite name for God (such as Father, Jesus, Lord, Abba, Holy One, etc.) and write it down. Now write a short sentence prayer that combines your favorite name for God with your answer to Jesus' question.

For example, "Lord Jesus, give me peace"; "Jesus, help me to love"; "Father, give me courage."

Ideally, your breath prayer should be 6-12 syllables. After you have chosen or created a breath prayer, make a goal to remain in God's abiding presence as you begin saying your prayer. Ponder the meaning and beauty of the words you are saying. Slowly say the first part of the prayer as you breathe in. Then slowly say the last part of the prayer as you exhale. There is no hurry or rush.

Say your breath prayer throughout the day whenever you remember. This form of prayer can also serve as a "tape" that can replace negative "tapes" or "commentaries" that often swirl around in our minds. Whenever you observe that you are negatively reacting to a person, event, or thing, say your breath prayer. God does not want you to embody the negative thoughts and feelings and thus poison yourself. Once you're aware of the negative thoughts and feelings, gently say your breath prayer.

## The Message

Hopefully, your reading thus far has given you some new insights into how you might more effectively share God's good news. The resources provided here are designed to provide further assistance. Find something that helps you to tell your story, but more importantly, find something that helps you relate your story to what God is doing in other people's lives.

### RESOURCES:

RightNow Media, "What is the Gospel" and "Sharing and Listening"

Campus Crusade, "Your Testimony"

EvanTell Evangelism Tools

e3 Resources

I Am Second Resources

Bridge Illustration (Watermark)

**Now, practice. Tell your story to your spouse, to friends, to children, to whomever you feel comfortable. Ask for their feedback. Where were you longwinded? Where could you be clearer? What can you leave out?**

## Trip-Specific Training

Please review any trip-specific information and/or training supplied by your trip leader. In addition to this material, if you are heading to a non-English-speaking context, please try to develop some basic language skills (greetings, numbers, simple questions like "What is your name?"). Speaking to someone in their heart language, even if just to say "Hello," can go a long way to begin building relationships.



## Part Four: Finish Line/Follow-Up

We hope that this process was beneficial to you, your mission trip, your sense of calling, and your spiritual formation. Let us know what you think of the process. Shortly after you return from your trip, we will email you a brief survey. We hope to capture your fresh perspective on this training as well as your experiences on the mission field. We appreciate your candid and constructive feedback.

Additionally, during your mission trip orientation you will set a date for a post-trip team celebration. This is an important component of your mission trip—much more than simply a reunion with your team. Your mission trip should not be a “one-and-done” experience, but the catalyst for long-term engagement and impact with a people and place. We will use this opportunity to reflect on what God has done in your life and the lives of others through your mission trip, and to discuss next steps for continued impact. We will also express VRBC’s value of being story tellers, as we capture stories that we can share with our congregation of the many things God has done.

Even beyond these two points of follow-up, we hope you will pray and consider how God might be calling you to engage long-term with God’s mission in the place you served. Whether you are serving on a team to help plan future mission trips, furthering the work you’ve done abroad in some way at home, or engaging in serving others in your home community, we expect that your involvement won’t stop here.

Let us know how we can help you connect with further opportunities to serve.