



Short-term Mission: A Family Affair.

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No Abstract

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Our daughter, Erica, would start college in the fall, so we wanted to make this last family summer vacation special. Erica, her fifteen-year-old brother, Tyler, and I had been busy dreaming about exotic options—perhaps a Caribbean cruise, or a week in Hawaii or Europe. Then my husband Bill calmly suggested, “I think it would be good for us to go on a mission trip together as a family.”

Bill’s simple suggestion grew into an experience more exciting than any pleasure trip a travel agency could have designed. The idea did not come out of the blue. As a family practitioner, Bill has offered his medical skills on several occasions. Five years ago we went with him to Russia; however, the children were too young

to appreciate the concept of mission work.

This time we found a family-oriented medical mission trip through Global Health Outreach, a department of the Christian Medical Dental Association. In late July, after prayerful consideration, we left for a one-week trip to Honduras. Each of us played a substantive role in ministry during the trip.

Preparing as a Family

After making the decision to pursue the mission, we applied. Each family member filled out questionnaires assessing strengths, weaknesses and faith commitment. The opportunity gave us new insight into our personal talents. At first Erica and Tyler asked, “Well, Dad’s a doctor and you’re a nurse, but

what can we do to help?”

We didn’t know what to tell them but encouraged them to think of anything they do well, even if they didn’t see the connection to a medical clinic. Erica leads Bible studies with children and youth, plays some piano and guitar and took four years of high school Spanish. Tyler helps with Bible school and nursery at church and enjoys sports. Both have easy-going personalities and are fairly flexible.

As they began to write, they saw some potential but still wondered how any of their skills fit with a medical clinic. We talked about allowing God to work it out. The kids began to trust God to use their talents, as we mailed the applications. Within a week we received word that we had been accepted for the team.

We notified churches, friends and family of our plans to go, asking for their prayer support. Erica and I began prayer journals—something that I had wanted to do for a long time but kept putting off. Bill and Tyler started going to breakfast together weekly to talk about the trip. Excitement grew as together we began to plan.

Next we began the practical preparations. Tyler and I were not current with Hepatitis A vaccinations, so we went together for our shots. Global Health Outreach sent resource books about Honduran culture and how to adapt. We learned that women do not usually wear shorts or slacks, so we had to shop for appropriate clothing, as well as mosquito repellent, sunscreen and scrubs for everyone, in case the kids worked in the clinic. We rarely all go shopping together, but we actually enjoyed it.

Tyler and I did most of the actual sorting and packing for the trip. We laughed and joked as we covered the garage floor with supplies, clothing and donations. On a normal summer evening, I would have read a book while Tyler played computer games or watched TV.

Working Together

We finally headed for San Marco, Honduras, a small rural mountain village about four hours from the capital city of Tegucigalpa. After arriving, we set up the clinic in a school, designating sections for registration, triage, several examination rooms, a pharmacy, an eye clinic, a dental clinic and a small lab with a mobile minor surgical suite. Global Health Outreach spent weeks in planning prior to our arrival and had already secured help from the local churches and most of the equipment for the clinic.

The team consisted of seven physicians, six RNs, two dentists, two pastors and approximately twenty logistics people—the family members of the professionals, including children ages thirteen to eighteen, wives, sisters, brothers-in-law and grandsons. Our children were amazed to see how God put together a team with the exact talents needed to run this particular clinic.

Prior to any medical service, the clients met with counselors and heard the gospel. Local pastors followed up with any new Christians to help them grow in their faith.

Each day the team conducted a Bible school for the local children. Erica and Tyler both found a rewarding ministry in the Bible school. They had from thirty to one hundred and eighty Honduran children at each Bible school, and taught from one to three times a day at different local schools. In addition to a Bible lesson, they had games, crafts and snacks. They enjoyed the gregarious Honduran children, who freely showed affection and loved their attention. Participating teens on the team had fun and felt they had done something worthwhile.

Other youth on the team worked in the pharmacy packaging medicines, or the eye clinic sorting glasses, or in the dental clinic washing instruments and even assisting the doctors and dentists.

All of the teens helped set up the clinic and repacked supplies at the end of the week. They played with the Honduran children when we visited in homes and at a Christian orphanage.

Regardless of the task, every member of the group played an important part in the ministry. We became one big family, encouraging and supporting one another. Seeing how other Christian families interacted and how they perceived this ministry as important impressed Erica and Tyler. They made friends, among the team and among the locals. They became increasingly aware that, despite our differences, we are all members of God's family and because of that, have great value.

I think all of the families on the team grew together spiritually on this trip. During the trip we had morning devotions with discussion focusing on the fruit of the Spirit. The children eagerly shared their ideas, applying the lessons to their daily endeavors at the clinic. We worshiped together at Honduran churches and had the opportunity to participate by singing American hymns and performing skits. We enjoyed the exuberant Honduran worship. The Hondurans' obvious love for the Lord moved us.

Afterthoughts

On the last day we met as a team to share impressions. The teens commented that at home they would be involved in activities, such as going to the movies or the mall. Here they saw children happy to play a simple hand-clapping game for hours without complaining. The teens were impressed by the way the team bonded. Although they didn't know each other previously, they came together with a common purpose in Christ.

Our family mission experience deepened our faith and drew us together as a family. Erica will be studying Christian education at college and is considering career mission work. Tyler wants to

pursue more short-term trips in the future. We gained a deeper appreciation for each other and for our country. We also have a greater burden for those who do not know Christ and a desire to be more consistent witnesses. It was exciting to be a part of a ministry as a family, offering thousands of people medical help, but more important, offering the opportunity to know Jesus as Savior.

This year we have no souvenirs from Disney World or photographs of the Grand Canyon from our summer vacation. However, we have something much greater—love for a people a world away and lessons learned about service for Christ. We have a deeper faith, a sense of togetherness as a family and a desire for more experiences in ministry like the week this summer in Honduras.