

A Small Yes is Better Than A Small No

MISSION GUIDE

10 Things Nobody Told You About Christian
Mission Trips

David Iskander

August 2017

© 2017 David Iskander

Dreams After Lunch

After lunch one day the teacher asked us if we knew the difference between a dream and a goal. We didn't know. Well, we didn't really care. We were in 7th grade and more interested in the opposite sex than our futures.

She explained that dreams are things that you want but will never have. Dreams are impossible, high-in-the-sky ideas that you will never achieve. And, goals are things you can achieve. Goals are practical, small, and attainable. "Don't go after your dreams... you don't want to be disappointed," she said.

I guess I never listened.

**"If you're not dreaming big for yourself, who's doing it for you?"
-Gary Vaynerchuk**

After weeks of learning and reading and studying, it was clear, God loves missions. And missions is a commitment.

A commitment to learning. That is, learning to unlearn.

Why are missions difficult? Because we will never be 100% ready to sign-up. It's like waiting for all the traffic lights of life to turn green before we start driving.

We won't leave the driveway.

We spend more time planning vacations than our time with God. This mission trip will open your eyes to the rich world of culture, heritage, and people.

Experience grows us and teaches us new ways of doing things and remaining open to different ways of getting things done. Alongside the journey, the wealthy opportunities will also open up your heart inside to your potential yet to discovered.

Because, finding your passion during your trip is a natural spring flowing anytime you dedicate a bigger portion of your life to building God's Kingdom.

× × ×

Maybe you have been on a mission trip. Maybe this is your first time. The ideas in this book are

the simple ideas that helped me get involved
with God's work locally and internationally.

A Small Yes is better than a Small No

You've probably heard the fable about Buridan's donkey.

It's a fable about a donkey that is standing halfway in between a pile of hay and a bucket of water. And he just keeps looking left to the hay or right to the water, trying to decide hay or water, hay or water, he's unable to decide. So he eventually falls over and dies of both hunger and thirst.

Making a choice, even a small yes, is better than a spineless no.

Small Yes > Small No

Mission trips are scary. We go with strangers, to help strangers, in a strange land with strange food and lots of strange sounds.

How do you say yes? Find someone you trust, and go with them. It makes all the scary stuff less scary.

"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."
-Mark Twain

Imagine the professor placed two piles of paper in front of you – one said "Your Life Plan" and the other had a big question mark on it. Then the professor proceeds and tells you, you can choose either one.

If you choose your life plan, well you get to do what you program. If you choose the question-mark, you get to pick whatever God has for you.

Never forget that nearly everything you do is for progress and growth, both of which are uncomfortable and highly more attractive to avoid.

"The more scared we are of a work or calling, the more sure we can be that we have to do it."
-Steven Pressfield

We spend our whole lives operating to avoid new, unknown, and potentially difficult tasks. A small yes makes your system react in funny

ways. Say yes because you are afraid. It's a good sign you are moving in the right direction.

"No one made a greater mistake
than he who did nothing because
he could only do little."
-Edmund Burke

Story Dinner Epic

Image you were hopping aboard a rugged plane to defend your city from attack. You have never flown nor have you ever held such responsibility that will save countless lives. But, *SOMEHOW*, your crew was the final hope to saving the people.

Why not tell an epic story about yourself? This isn't just a mission trip. This is *Rogue One* defending the galaxy or *Lord of the Rings* eliminating darkness, epic. This is a story you can tell at the dinner table again and again, epic!

The craft of storytelling is in speech, writing, and the most forgotten, actions. All the best, those we look up to, are storytellers in all three.

Study your actions to reflect on the story you are telling. Prof. G put it this way, "We shape our identity with each passing moment. Can you reinvent yourself? You're already doing it, *right now!*"

"Life is lived forward but understood backwards."

- Søren Kierkegaard

Epic stories start with a main character who gets hit with an obstacle. The obstacle is quite literally insurmountable, overwhelming, and they are underprepared. The epicness comes when they face the challenge regardless. Something inside of them cannot not face it.

In a world full of noise, crafting your story and investing in telling your story to the world is one of the most amazing ways to realize all the potential inside of you.

To tell your story, keep it simple. Break routines, break comfort zones, or break your box (what defines you). Do this periodically and you will write an epic story.

And, look at your past: What is a memory that sticks out when you were 7, 17, or 27? Where did you grow up? What do you remember about school? No experience is wasted.

Write, dance, play, sing, laugh, and run only as you can. Do all the stupid things that you should be doing. I heard it said like this, "Your biggest risk isn't failing, it's getting too comfortable (Drew Houston)." Make your life adorably, embarrassingly, and unapologetically, you.

Chopsticks & Oatmeal

Adapting to a different culture and lifestyle is explosive. Instead of eating with a spoon, you eat with chopsticks. Instead of ordering your own plate, you order family style. Everything you know as normal is liable to be challenged.

When I tried to learn how to use chopsticks for the first time I was 23 or 24. I was a mess. I could barely hold them. For a week, I forced myself to eat everything with chopsticks, even oatmeal. It took 4x as long to eat the oatmeal.

Now, I use chopsticks regularly.

Their Story and Your Story

Back to stories - why are stories so important?
Why should you study them?

Story makes everything meaningful. It brings purpose to the most seemingly insignificant things. Stories help us realize that any task, however mundane, carries with it opportunity for godlike qualities: completion, order, kindness, love, patience, and beauty.

In my first book, Purpose Built Young, I finished the book with this thought:

*In the same way,
Colored pencils are used to draw,
Applications are created to engineer,
Satellites are made to orbit,
Pens are made to write,
Coffee is made to drink,
Airplanes are made to fly,
Cars are made to drive,
Books are made to be read,
Your life is made to have purpose.*

The goal of this adaptation is strength. Passion comes from suffering and suffering makes us stronger and strength is what we are looking for, right?

Strength to follow our dreams, to believe in Jesus despite difficult circumstances, to give up our own goals and desires to adopt His?

You may feel inadequate and unable to help the poor, suffering, and hurt. You don't need to be extremely wealthy or have suffered a great sickness or dealt a great, mighty loss to be able to relate. Your relationship starts with the simple fact that both of you need the cross. That

makes your story connect whether or not you use chopsticks or forks.

"Because those who are doing their best work are also bringing the greatest impact and changing the things around them, the most."
Seth Godin

At the end of the day, you want people to say, "Today, it was great to see you."

Mission's is about an effort but not really. It's about the people you meet. The people you interact with. They leave something behind in you.

"We leave something of ourselves behind when we leave a place, we stay there, even though we go away. And there are things in us that we can find again only by going back there."
— Pascal Mercier

Knowing yourself is difficult. Most people aren't equipped with the emotional intelligence to reflect upon their actions and reactions so quickly. What our interactions with people then become are simply a way we develop emotional depth and understanding within ourselves.

Irresistible Tiny Questions

School taught us to memorize answers. Life teaches us how to ask questions. And ask questions that don't have specific answers.

"Problems," Einstein said, "cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them."

"Google everything. I mean everything. Google your dreams, Google your problems. Don't ask a question before you Google it. You'll either find the answer or you'll come up with a better question."
-Adam Kleon

We are being asked questions all the time, so respond with questions to find clarity.

Life says, "Can you take *this* on?"

We then say: Take what on? *This*? Do you mean *this* or that? How much of *this*? What is *this*? Is *this* as big as we thought? Is *this* impossible? Has *this* ever been taken on before? Why? Why me? Why *this*? Why now?

Neils Bohr, a super smart scientist said, "An expert is a person who has made all the mistakes that can be made in a very narrow field." By asking irresistible tiny questions, you begin to uncover all the hidden spots in a chosen area of life.

Irresistible tiny questions will always lead to colossal vision and impact. You will think of something big. Then make it even bigger. Then multiply it by 10.

History is being written by people like you who question the future.

The best way to predict the future
is to create it.
-Peter Drucker

Victor Frankl, a survivor of multiple concentration camps in WWII said, "Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he must recognize that it is he who is asked." I would add something to the end of that quote. It would say this: He must recognize that it is he who can come up with creative solutions to what life questions of him by digging deeper."

What is life asking of you right now? (Ask 20 questions back at it!)

A mission trip will take you out of your box. It will take your answers out of a box. You may end up with more questions than answers. There are so many things you still have to learn.

Rice and packages and new iPhones can go in a box; but not your faith or future.

Hand Emoji's

Emoji's are amazingly descriptive. I could just name a few and you can picture them:

Writing hand...

Raised hand...

Clapping hand...

Waving hand...

Folding hands...

Okay hand...

Open hands...

In one symbol, complex human emotion is effortlessly expressed. It's the same thing with service.

Service, by definition, is an emoji. It's wonderfully descriptive. That's why God uses it as his main means of building His Kingdom.

We have something wired inside of us that longs to serve others. It offers the most fulfillment we could ever experience – more than money, power, or fame.

Service is simply helping or doing the work for someone else. The best performance on a

mission trip is open hands because open hands signifies a willing heart. "If everyone works to out serve one another, we won't have any quarrels," is one of the truest declarations I have ever heard.

It creates a language that everyone can understand – despite fluency or age. At the same time, it gives us everything we need to be replicas of Jesus.

"We make a living by what we get,
but we make a life by what we
give."

-Winston Churchill

Service Isn't For God

If God doesn't need anything, why does he ask us to serve Him? Because, somehow, service is this magically sweet freedom that brings us to peace within ourselves. There is an ancient saying, "When there is no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot hurt you."

Jesus gave a more spiritual context, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Instead, fear the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

Peace on the inside means being able to take on any outside. One of my favorite verses in the Bible:

"But remember this—the wrong desires that come into your life aren't anything new and different. Many others have faced exactly the same problems before you. And no temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it, for he has promised this and will do what he says. He will show you how to escape temptation's power so that you can bear up patiently against it."

– 1 Corinthians 10:13

Mission's puts us in direct contact with a scary outside. Service reminds us of why we need to do it.

I wish I realized sooner that I needed to be an active participant in creating the faith I desired. I was floating and going with whatever came my way – I wasn't very active about thinking about what type of person I wanted to be, or what kind of impact I wanted to have.

Leverage our hardwiring to only notice what's different by loving and serving your sphere of influence, radically. I mean, why not, when it shows the firmest form of grace.

Service is like many things in life, it puts into practice those things which are only understood through experience. You can study four years and get a degree on swimming and have zero ability to actually swim. Grace is first and chiefly revealed through experience. Service, especially to those who you own nothing to is the surest way to reveal unmerited favor.

I changed my mind: Service actually much more descriptive than any emoji. It's like all the hand emoji's described in one.

One Plus One = 11

When you start out on the team, it's simple. You barely see each other.

Trust starts to build. Building trust isn't like building a house. It's like building an aquarium.

There are basic rules to building trust like boundaries and common agreements but it's not much more straightforward than that. Building deep trust takes lots of vulnerability. How much trust was built after Peter stepped out the boat?

In school, we learned $1 + 1 = 2$.

In relationships, it's a fact, $1 + 1 = 11$.

There's this theory, that when we work together, we can do much more than what we could do alone.

Family's are difficult. Well, people are difficult and people you are close to for long periods of time are difficult.

**"No entity, natural or economic,
evolves in isolation."
-Jane Jacobs**

When you feel overwhelmed, tell someone.

There is a magic in getting something off your chest.

Learn to love people different from you. It helps you be gentler with yourself.

If you feel you "don't belong," create your place with everyone. Not belonging could be a great starting point to a miracle.

Mission trips are powerful because they are a group of strangers partnering together to serve another group of strangers for no other reason than to give love. The main point isn't the job getting done, but the process of everything.

No one has it all figured out but we can figure it out altogether.

People Eat Different Ways

We all eat with our hands but some eat with forks or with chopsticks or with their actual hands or with sporks.

All around the world we are different. Respect that. When you tell other people they should or ought or must – the first thing you display is insecurity. Tough section? I know. It took me a long time to learn this.

"Keep your head down... Follow the rules, do as your told, play it safe. Wait your turn, ask permission, learn to compromise... this is terrible advice."
-Casey Neistat

Jesus never gave advice... did He? Instead, He always made it a point to love first and foremost, despite differences. Everyone isn't looking for advice. They are looking for ways to connect. The magic of what some call "Me too." Instead of acting like we know everything, what if we started to connect across questions rather than our competing answers?

"How you see the world, depends
on where you sit."
- Roger Fisher

Culture isn't tricky. We make it tricky. When we accept people where they are, not expecting them to follow standards they have never even experienced, our relationship is already 100x more likely to have a lasting impact.

"They have to understand that
their neighbor is, in the end, just
like them, with the same
problems, the same questions"
- Paulo Coelho

Life's too short to hate what you do all day and then force people to live by the same expectations. We invent excuses and activities that mean very little for the actual success of any given task, project, or life because we were taught to imitate others, go with the flow, and follow paths without making them our own. That's why we could pause before we throw out our "world-class" advice to culture, people, and lifestyle we barely understand.

Life is not a problem to be solved,
but a reality to be experienced.
- Søren Kierkegaard

Be Exceptional

The *Pencil of Promise* founder Adam Braun, in his book *The Promise of a Pencil* said something that stuck with me, "Why be normal?"

It's a great question. I mean, sincerely, why be normal? To avoid a few strangers weighty glance? To not shake up the pool? How boring!

"I think the reward for conformity is that everyone likes you except yourself."

— Rita Mae Brown

Everyone has issues and challenges and shortcomings and flaws and anxieties and pain. If I could go to the top of a mountain and tell everyone one thing, I would say: We are all crazy trying to figure this thing out. Forget the pity party, let's admit our corks, and have a good time!

We would never eat lettuce if we never created dressing. I mean, seriously, what's the point of lettuce? Salads aren't salads because of the lettuce. Salads are salad because of everything else!

It's the same thing with your life. Your life isn't your life because you are breathing. Your life is a life because of everything else – your corks, your peculiarities, your odd habits.

**Eating lettuce was never exciting
until we created dressing.**

Open the door to being exceptional by doing the unexpected. Wherever you see a possibility to do something unexpected-do it!

Gary Vaynerchuk, a type of entrepreneur/celeb said, "If you want to be an anomaly, you've gotta act like one." I couldn't agree more.

Missions are something completely unselfish, expecting nothing in return. For months you fundraise, go to meetings, prepare, take time off work, and travel to a foreign place with cold showers to serve others for two weeks. Isn't that the oddest thing you can do?

Missions give you an opportunity to not just step outside your comfort zone but to jump out. Why are missions of any value? You defy all your norms and thus create new norms. And this helps other people step outside their norm.

The secret of a nomadic life isn't in moving, it's being willing to move and take all of you, anywhere you go.

And I get it: People aren't naturally excited about switching, changing, and adapting unless they are guaranteed it's better, faster, and smaller. Businesses work that way. But not life. There is no guarantee that switching will lead to better, so we become afraid and say, 'not yet.'

And not yet is the enemy of serendipity and serendipity is a certain way to unexpected joy.

So, why be normal?

Hope

Hope is an art, and there are plenty of touchy-feely, probably super-unfunny sentiments frequently expressed about hope like narcissism, stubbornness, and unnecessary pain. Hope is the burning ambition for the future. It's the expectation to be the strongest version of oneself. It raises your spirit to continue despite pain, misery, sorrow, and grief.

Hope is like running on a treadmill. Every second on the treadmill you are burning energy. As you prepare for your trip, it will feel like someone just handed you a 12-pound bowling ball. Most often, we feel like we are already carrying three other bowling balls, be it school, work, kids, or relationships. It's hard to imagine we can handle anymore.

The power to hold on, despite everything, is best summed up in one source, one key, one word – hope. Hope isn't dropping bowling balls, jumping off the treadmill, and passing out on the coach. It's having spirit withstanding the treadmill and every bowling ball you get handed.

When you sign up for your trip, you will eventually run into walls – moments you feel overwhelmed or underprepared. And that's okay. Life is going to give us bowling balls no matter what - if we decide to go or not.

What if that was the best part?

[I never found this answer easily convincing, but it holds the most truth.]

Hope is the most active stance you could take toward a situation. Cynicism or complaining or gossiping is a lazy approach to life.

"Optimism has conations of wishful thinking. Hope, to me, is a robust and insists on a full picture of reality, which includes all the terrible things we read in the newspaper, but also takes seriously all the beautiful things around us, which are also part of the story of our time."

-Krista Tippett

Hope is much quieter than doubt. It's modest and still. It's the most dangerous force on the planet. It keeps you on the treadmill. Doubt is easier to focus on but hope is always there to focus on, as well.

Hope has a tension that we ought to embrace. When you feel the overwhelming desire to quit, I remind myself of this: we all should have quit a long time ago. Anything we work towards is up to be taken from us every day. You're not required to save the world; but, you're not excited by laying on the coach and watching it suffer.

**"Rebellions are built on hope."
-Lyn in Star Wars: Rogue One**

The beauty of hope is that you can always stop, but stopping would mean giving up and giving up would be the end and inevitably, we don't choose the end. So we might as well keep swimming until we have nothing left. I mean, what else would you do?

Conclusion

Well, that's it. Maybe you expected a deeper dive into the spiritual elements of unity or love or foreign lands or how to pack. Your leader will be the best to help you there.

When your trip is over, think of it as a rebirth. You aren't ending one of the best journeys of your life, you are just beginning. Consider that for a moment as you walk through your daily routine the first week once you get back.

**"Don't cry because it's over, smile
because it happened."
— Dr. Seuss**

If you are upset about your current situation when you arrive back at home, that's a good thing. It means you are growing. Isn't it sad that we have lives where we spend two weeks doing everything we know we are called to just to have fifty weeks where we *get by*?

I remember after coming back from my first few mission trips with more pain than my life was setup to work jobs I hated for a house and car and phone that I didn't really value. It didn't happen overnight, but it all changed. Now I do what I love all year round.

Growth takes time so don't give up hope too soon and remember that fire inside of you is what will propel you. More than anything, make your decisions, not on what others expect of you, but what you expect of you.

"We would worry less about what others think of us if we realized how seldom they do."
— Ethel Barrett

Do less. Buy less. Consume less. Drive less. Unplug more. Walk more. Sleep more. Stop multitasking and do one thing at a time. Don't invent problems, discover thankfulness. Embed slow moments and rituals into your schedule.

If you are unsure of purpose – turn off the online world for 14 days and get quiet. The world is very noisy. Social media is very noisy. People are very noisy. Search within yourself, quietly, patiently, little by little, and you will find more of who you are. You're not a couple steps behind. You are right where you need to be. There is no rush.

"The universe buries strange jewels deep within us all, and then stands back to see if we can find them."
— Elizabeth Gilbert

If this helped you, share it with a friend who is going on their first trip. It could make all the difference.

About David

If you've ever listened to me talk about my back story, inevitably the fact that I'm an immigrant comes up. I am ethnically Coptic/Sa'idi (which is mainly the denomination of Christians in Egypt), and my family immigrated to the United States 18 months before I was born.

I attribute 95% of any success I've had to the fact that my family immigrated. I have cousins in Egypt who are smarter than I am, far harder working than I am, and immensely more strategic and savvy than I am...

And yet because I was born to the right set of humans, I've had 1000x more opportunities than any of them.

As such, I embrace living the immigrant dream. To me, living my life in a meaningful way means making a positive impact in my local and international community. I have one main purpose:

**Fight for orphans who are
burdened by a lack of basic needs.**

I'm young and love Jesus. I believe young people have much more power than we realize and now have more reason to live with purpose than ever before (yet somehow don't).

"Given that we can live only a small part of what there is in us -- what happens with the rest?"

— Pascal Mercier

I believe missions are an integral part of walking with Jesus. I'm living in Orange County, California. Feel free to get in touch below.

[Get in Touch](#)

Message Me Here

David@DavidIskander.com

Website Here

DavidIskander.com

Instagram Here

@Diskander