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SOME MEDITATIONS FOR YOUR GROUP

A 10 day devotional guide for missions teams

Day One: Tarantula in Your Bed?!

Psalm 139

OK. So most likely you won't actually find a tarantula in your bed during your visit. (We did have one in our garage once.) However, you may find a number of other bugs and spiders that you're not accustomed to. And you will most likely be surprised by certain things -- like the homes people live in, the clothes they wear, or the way things are done. It's usually wise to expect the unexpected when you are out of your normal surroundings. At times it may even seem overwhelming or chaotic, as though nothing is in control.

However, just look at Psalm 139 and think about God's control. Who made you from the beginning? Who has every step of your life planned out? Who knows your every move? God is in control of everything. He's with you no matter where you go. So take that truth with you, be prepared to be flexible, and don't worry about the tarantulas in your bed. **Remember the "new beatitude" – "Blessed are the flexible, for they will not snap."**

Questions to think about:

- 1) How does poverty fit into God's sovereignty?
- 2) Does God choose some to be "poor" and some to be "rich"?
- 3) Why do we still see smiles on the faces of the poor? What do you think they have that we don't?

Additional scripture: Habakkuk 3 (note verses 17-19)

Day Two: Control Amid Chaos

Isaiah 40: 1 – 11; 25 - 31

The Lord is in control of all things. Sometimes that's hard to see in the "chaos" of today's world. Having seen firsthand the destruction of the earthquakes and hurricanes, there were times that I felt everything was out of control. It was sickening to see death and devastation all around. However, God was in control throughout it all. What I learned about the Lord, about His mercy, goodness, and compassion, and about trusting in Him, I could never have learned any other way. Above all, I know that God knew it all from the beginning.

Questions to think about:

- 1) How do natural disasters, trials, and sufferings fit into God's design?
- 2) At what times does your life get filled with chaos? How do you get control? Where does God fit in?
- 3) How have adverse circumstances affected your life? Can you share something that you may have experienced?
(Note to leader: if you share first, others may feel free to share as well)
- 4) What words of comfort do you find in the verses that we read?

Day Three: What a Great Body!

Romans 12:3-8 and Revelation 5:9-10

What a great body! That may not be a statement you hear about yourself every day. For some of us, age is already taking its toll on our bodies. However, when you think about how the body functions, how intricately it was designed, you can't help but say, "What a great body!" The same goes for the body of Christ. When you think about how the church functions, and what an amazing variety of people it encompasses, you can't help but praise God for the grandness of His kingdom.

You will meet many new people during your visit -- people with a different skin color, a different language, and different lifestyle. Yet if you listen and look closely, you will meet some incredible members of the body of Christ. They may worship differently and express their faith differently, but that's the beauty of God's church. It's an amazing mixture of languages, tribes, nations, and people, all praising God in unique and glorious ways. So learn from the other Christians, share with them, and rejoice in God's great body!

Questions to think about:

- 1) How have you seen the body of Christ here?
- 2) Do people here say "Well, we have nothing, therefore we will sit here and do nothing?" What have they done with their situation – how have you seen them in the struggles they face because of the earthquakes? What can we learn from them?
- 3) What are the similarities and differences from the body of Christ in North America?
- 4) Even though God has entrusted each of us with different gifts, can we move "outside the box" (what we know and are comfortable with) of these gifts? How?
Share a time when you became an "eye" or a "hand" or something else, when you didn't really feel you had those gifts, yet God blessed you. What did you learn from that experience?

Additional scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-25

Day Four: Outhouse Etiquette

Philippians 2:1-11

I grew up with running water and indoor plumbing. I've become quite comfortable with a flush toilet. However, living in a third-world country, there are times when an outhouse or latrine is the only thing available.

Sometimes I find it hard not to be a bit disgusted by the smell or the unsanitary conditions. I may even think I have all the answers for "fixing" the problem and wonder why people here just "don't get it."

However, I'm reminded that my grandparents never had indoor plumbing. Yet I would never consider them ignorant or lazy. They were merely doing the best with what they had. In Philippians 2:1-11, Paul reminds us to "do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." We may think we have all the answers for other people, but we've never lived their lives. We are much better off putting on the attitude of Christ, who "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" and humbled himself before God and man.

So go ahead and use the outhouse, cheerfully and humbly. You may have to hold your breath and watch where you sit, but it's either that or a bush.

Questions to think about:

- 1) What have you seen here, that doesn't make sense to you?
- 2) What have you seen here that DOES make sense?
- 3) In considering others "better than yourselves", how can you "make sense" of those things?

Verse 3 says to "do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility regard others better." Were these your thoughts today?

Additional scripture: Romans 12:1-2 and 9-18

- 4) What would be God's will for us as we move on from here? Is this an isolated experience for us?

Day Five: More Thoughts on Humility

(quotes from C.S. Lewis)

"Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call 'humble' nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what *you* said to *him*. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all."

"If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a bigish step, too. At least, nothing can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed."

Questions to think about:

- 1) Has God humbled you here in any way?
- 2) What difference will that humility make when you leave here?
- 3) Is humility related to material wealth (i.e. the less you have, the more humble you are)?

Day Six: Say What?

James 2:14-26

"What did he say?" "How do you say that in Creole?" "Where did he say the bathroom is?" "Boy, I didn't understand a word of that sermon." You just may find yourself saying these things, if you're not fluent in Creole or French. It can be very frustrating at times. You may even feel uncomfortable with the lack of communication.

You may also begin to wonder how we can share our faith with others, if we can't speak their language? What kind of testimony can we give? Just look at James 2:14-26. "Faith without works is dead." That would mean a faith *with* works is alive! Your actions will speak volumes about your faith, your compassion, and your love for others through Christ. Don't be afraid to share your faith.

"Tell" the people what it means to you to be a child of God. Live your testimony through everything you do. And let the translator help you find the bathroom!

Questions to think about:

- 1) What are some of the frustrations or comical situations you've had in not knowing the language?
- 2) What are some of the specific ways to "tell" people about your Lord without using language?
- 3) How have the people of the community shared *their* faith with you? What words/actions have they used?
- 4) What are you learning about the faith of the people of Haiti?

Additional scripture: Psalm 146

Day Seven: The Joy of Loving

II Corinthians 8:1-4, 8

*“Love is the overflow of joy in God which gladly meets the needs of others. Paul (in II Cor. 8:1-4) did not set the Macedonians up as a model of love just because they sacrificed in order to meet the needs of others. What he stresses is how they *loved* doing this. It was the overflow of JOY! They ‘begged earnestly’ to give. They found their pleasure in channeling the grace of God through their poverty to the poverty in Jerusalem. It is simply astonishing!*

This is why a person can give his body to be burned and not have love. Love is the overflow of joy *in* God! It is not duty for duty’s sake, or right for right’s sake. It is not a resolute abandoning of one’s own good with a view solely to the good of the other person. It is first a deeply satisfying experience of the fullness of God’s grace, and then a doubly satisfying experience of sharing that grace with another person.”

(Desiring God by John Piper, p. 103)

Questions to think about:

- 1) What motivated you to come here?
- 2) How can we joyfully meet the needs of others here and around the world?
- 3) How can we joyfully meet the needs of those in your group?
- 4) Read this Psalm – close your eyes and think of what God might be saying to you personally.

Additional scripture: Psalm 146

Day Eight: No Tripping

I Corinthians 10:23-33

Have you ever watched a toddler run? You can't help but hold your breath as you hope that pebble or pine cone or clump of grass in the way doesn't send the little tike sprawling on the ground. Stumbling is something we all do at every age, but the toddler is certainly more prone to it.

The same goes for Christians. As we mature in our faith, our ability to stand firm grows stronger. However, as new Christians, it's much easier to stumble and fall. Read I Corinthians 10:23-33. Paul understood the need for discretion, for choosing our actions carefully. We may not always agree with other Christians' "rules", but we can be sensitive to them. We can do our best not to make others stumble and fall.

Remember that, as a visitor in another country, you will be watched constantly. People will look at you and make conclusions about Christianity, about our Lord, and about serving Him. You can choose to be a pebble or pinecone or clump of grass in their way. Or you can be Christ's light showing the way clearly to the Father.

Question to think about:

- 1) In what ways can we avoid being a stumbling block to others (in other cultures as well as our own)?

Additional scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Day Nine: Mountain Climbing, Anyone?

Psalm 148

You're hanging by a rope, with only a few feet to go. You pull yourself up with all the strength you can muster and you finally reach the peak of the mountain. Can you see the incredible beauty all around? Can you feel the exhilaration?

OK. Actually all I can imagine is the total exhaustion and the fear of hanging from a rope hundreds of feet in the air. However, I do know God's creation is incredibly rich and beautiful. There is something indescribable about the awesome height of a mountain, the roar of a waterfall, the smell of a rose, the feel of a sandy beach under your feet, or the taste of a juicy, ripe pineapple.

Read Psalm 148 and capture the sense of awe and wonder the psalmist has for God's creation. Then take the time to experience the amazing beauty of the country you're visiting and to praise God for His awesome creation. (The mountain climbing rope is optional!)

Questions to think about:

- 1) What beauty have you seen here?
- 2) How can we see beauty in what appears "ugly" to us?
- 3) How have you experienced God in this place? In creation; in the people; in each other; in...?

Additional scripture: Psalm 8, Psalm 19:1-6

Day Ten: Whatever

Colossians 3:11-17

I like the word "whatever." It's flexible, open, and willing. It seems to cover many of the topics we just read about. Take a look:

- (1) Whatever happens, God is in complete control.
- (2) Whatever one member of the body experiences, the rest of God's people share with him/her.
- (3) Whatever you do for the least of God's people, you do for Him.
- (4) Whatever you say and do will be watched by others and will be a testimony to your faith.
- (5) Whatever beauty, majesty, and intricacy you see in the world is witness to God's incredible creation.

I'm sure there are more applications, but my favorite appears in Colossians 3:17. "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." There is no better goal in life than to glorify God in WHATEVER you do and say. May God bless you as you experience another culture, and may the Lord be glorified through it all!!

And finally... Whatever happened here in the last 10 days/2 weeks is going to make a difference in my life. Have *each* person share how this experience has impacted their life and what difference it will make.

If your plan is to have people share who their prayer partners were – this would be a good time to do that exercise. Close in a final prayer.

A Final Thought: (from Desiring God by John Piper)

On December 4, 1857, David Livingstone, the great pioneer missionary to Africa, made a stirring appeal to the students of Cambridge University, showing that he had learned through the years of experience what Jesus was trying to teach Peter: "For my own part, I have never ceased to rejoice that God has appointed me to such an office. People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice, which is simply paid back as a small part of a great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay? Is that a sacrifice which brings its own blest reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter? Away with the word in such a view, and with such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say, rather, it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger, now and then, with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver, and the soul to sink; but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall be revealed in and for us. I never made a sacrifice." "The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever." May this be your joy in all of life, in whatever you do – that where God has placed you is a privilege and a pleasure, because "the chief end of man is to glorify God by ENJOYING Him forever!"