



Short-term Missions That Heal

A Workshop

Daniel Rickett



Daniel Rickett | www.danielrickett.com

Caring for others across the wealth divide starts with *who* others are, not with *what* we have to give. Inability to value others as we value ourselves can subvert our good intentions, hurting the people we're trying to love. In this workshop, we explore how to establish healthy relationships across the wealth divide.

PURPOSE:

Explore how to care for people in need without doing them harm

PROCESS:

- Discuss the major barriers to relationships that heal
- Draw lessons from a case study
- Identify characteristics of a healing approach
- Discuss major barriers to relationships that heal

First Barrier: How we view others

Establishing healthy relationships starts with how we view others. Good people don't intend to think of themselves as better than others. It's not so much about having a superior attitude or a savior complex. It's more about misplaced values.

Values are things we love and deem important. They are the lens through which we interpret the world. For instance, we value the *material world*, our lifestyle in material terms: house, furniture, refrigerator, washing machine, dryer, dishwasher, toilet, shower, air conditioner, electric lights, electric clock, television, stereo system, computer, telephone, shiny wooden floor, carpeting, vacuum cleaner, bed, pillow, clean sheets and blankets, clothing, shoes, lots of shoes, garage door opener, and, of course, the ubiquitous car.

We value a variety of foods—and food in abundance.

We value the freedom that material wealth affords: leisure time, hobbies, discretionary spending on every imaginable outdoor activity, indoor entertainment, and creature comfort. Entire industries exist to fill the space afforded by our freedom.

We value mobility. Not long ago, to spend a few days visiting with colleagues and board members, I flew to California and rented a car. We are accustomed to hopping in our cars and driving wherever in North America we want to go.

These values seem reasonable and normal. It's only fair that others should have them too. And that's not so wrong. It's not wrong to think that others should be able to enjoy the freedoms, comforts, and opportunities we enjoy.

The problem arises when these values are, in our minds, primary rather than secondary—causing us to see others through the lens of what *we have* rather than the lens of *who they are*. As a result, we see others as needy, and ourselves as privileged. We leap to the conclusion that they need what we have.

Seeing others in view of what *we* think they need gets us off to a bad start. It's a bad start because it immediately places us in a one-way, giver-receiver relationship. Before we even begin, the relationship is defined by what we can do for others rather than by our common humanity. It's a bad start because it causes us to think of poverty only in material terms rather than in human terms. The condition of the human spirit is what makes a person rich or poor.

So, *the first task of short-term missions is to change the lens through which we see others*. We have to take off the material lens and put on the kingdom lens. This requires two things: first, it requires that we gain a biblical view of others; and second, it requires that we see others in their story—in their own terms and historical context and in the story God is writing.

We start with a biblical view of "Others." A biblical view of Others, Paul Hiebert observed, begins with our common humanity with all people. This means that "*...at the deepest level of our identity as humans, there are no Others, there is only us*" (Hiebert 1996, 77). Our oneness of humanity is revealed in Scriptures such as Genesis 1:26, Psalm 148:11–13, Isaiah 45:22, Micah 4:1–2, Luke 10:25–37. If we are to have compassion for others, it must be rooted in the belief that they are like us—made in the image of God, endowed with gifts, charged with responsibility, and free to stand or fall before God.

What's more Hiebert wrote, "*...in the church there are no Others; there are only us—members of the body of Christ*" (Hiebert 1996, 79). Consider, for instance, Ephesians 4:4, Galatians 2:11–21, 1 Corinthians 10–11, Acts 2:44 and 4:32. This unity in Christ not only bridges the human distinctions of ethnicity, class, and gender but it also binds us together as family. If we start with the view that other believers are our brothers and sisters in Christ, then our concern for their welfare will be balanced by our concern for their dignity, freedom, and fellowship. Our concern will be tempered by the reality that our welfare is bound with theirs.

When we see others as fellow human beings, made in the image of God, our lens begins to adjust from a material perspective to a kingdom perspective. Instead of seeing others in terms of poverty, we see them as we see ourselves—full of potential for beauty and for harm. Joel Wickre puts it eloquently, "Poor people are people. Those who live and die in want of basic needs are just as smart, beautiful,

creative, motivated, holy, and wise as you and I. They are also just as dumb, ugly, dull, lazy, sinful, and foolish as you and I” (Wickre 2007, 1).

Viewing others through the kingdom lens, we begin to see poverty as a *human* condition rather than merely a *material* condition, which brings us to the second barrier.

Second Barrier: How we view poverty

For many people, if not for most, poverty is considered a material problem. Visit the slums of the world’s super-cities and it’s immediately obvious how little the poor have. Slum dwellers have a dirt floor for a bed, a shack for a house, no running water, no toilet, inadequate nutrition, crowded living conditions, exposure to sickness, and the list goes on.

Such material deprivation screams for a remedy. But the reality is that all the wealth of all the nations cannot fix poverty by merely satisfying the material needs. Don’t get me wrong. Material deprivation has a deadening effect on the human spirit. Material needs must be addressed. But material needs cannot be the starting point because poverty, at its root, is not a material problem. Poverty is a human problem.

When we put on the kingdom lens, we begin to see that the poor don’t merely need *things*. They need freedom, dignity, knowledge, skills, hope, and opportunity. *They need the qualities that empower people to overcome the causes of poverty.* The kingdom perspective allows us to see that the meaning of human existence goes deeper than merely obtaining what material values appear to offer. It enlightens our understanding about what is right and what is wrong in our relationship with one another, in our relationship with creation, and in our relationship with God.

When we see poverty as a human problem, our agenda changes from merely giving aid to accompanying the poor in gaining dignity, power, education, health, security, and opportunity. Instead of giving aid in a downward, giver-receiver relationship, we begin to give ourselves in solidarity with persons in need.

How can short-term missions establish healthy relationships across the wealth divide?

DRAW LESSONS FROM A CASE STUDY

Read Joel Wickre's article, "Missions That Heal: Ministering across the wealth divide means giving up our savior complex" (Wickre 2007). Pay close attention to the case study of the Nicaraguan village of Santa Rosa. Discuss the following questions:

1. What was accomplished?
2. How was it accomplished? Work through the question in two parts:
 - a. List the steps of how it was accomplished.
 - b. Identify important characteristics of the situation.

Record answers to question 2 on a flip chart.

IDENTIFY CHARACTERISTICS OF A HEALING APPROACH

Based on the discussion and case study, what steps and factors will lead to healthy relationships across the wealth divide? Record answers on a flip chart.

1. Have two facilitators, one foreign and one local.
2. Spend several months on-site, participating in daily life, listening, learning, and building relationships.
3. Learn from the community, church, or mission their concerns and interests.
4. Ask the community, "Would you be interested in working with groups of Americans; if so, what would you like to do with them?"
5. Participate with the community in defining an agenda to address their concerns and issues.
6. Prepare short-term missionaries several months in advance by teaching them the host country's history, politics, economics, religion, and culture.
7. Put the facilitators in charge of the short-term missionaries.

Last Word

Short-term missions cannot be depersonalized by reducing the mission to merely a program or a project. Relationships that heal are personal; projects are impersonal. Eugene Peterson's advice is relevant here: "We are involved in a highly personal, interrelational, dynamic way of life consisting of many elements... that are constantly being rearranged, always in flux, and always in relation to our very personal and holy God and our very personal (but not so holy!) brothers and sisters" (Peterson 2007, 2).

The healing way for short-term missions is not in meeting needs or fixing problems. The healing way is a way of thinking, a way of being, which refuses to do *good works* in impersonal ways. ■

Notes

- Paul G. Heibert, “Critical Issues in the Social Sciences and Their Implications for Mission Studies,” *Missiology: An International Review* 24, no. 1 (1996): 77–82.
- Joel Wickre, “Missions That Heal: Ministering across the wealth divide means giving up our savior complex,” *Christianity Today* (July 13, 2007). Available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/julyweb-only/128-52.0.html>. Accessed 17 July 2007.
- Eugene H. Peterson, *The Jesus Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 2.

About The Author

Daniel Rickett is executive vice president of She Is Safe (www.sheissafe.org).

He is the author of *Making Your Partnership Work* (eBook, 2014) and *Building Strategic Relationships* (2008). Information about Dr. Rickett’s teaching and consulting services can be found at www.danielrickett.com.