Team Leader Reflection Curriculum
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Introduction

This curriculum is designed to help you carry out spiritual and personal conversations with the students on your team. Inside, you will find discussion questions, guidelines on how to listen well, prayer practices and explanations for them, as well as how to build discussion of the contents of the student journals.

This curriculum will not give you the answers to your students’ difficult problems. It will not tell you how to solve every issue in their lives, but it will help you be open to listening to them, and give you some strategies for caring for them and their journey.

Some of sections in this book are designed to help you think about daily interactions with your students, while others focus on leading discussions at the end of each of day and at the end of the trip. Utilize what is most helpful to you and your team. If you feel that something is not working after a couple of tries, it’s alright to abandon that practice and find something that better fits your team’s culture. This curriculum is a resource to help you think about your interactions with your students and guide them, and ultimately yourselves, into deeper reflection about how God is working in their lives and in this trip.
Asking Good Questions

This section provides lots of great questions to help you and your students get to know one another. While some questions allow the responder to remain on the surface, others plunge more deeply into self-disclosure. Try using these when you’re not sure what to talk about with a student.

These questions work on a variety of levels. The first set of questions are past-tense sharing questions. These questions deal with past events in people’s lives, and are good for when a group is just beginning or there isn’t a high degree of trust yet.

• Where did you live when you were twelve years old, and what is one strong memory you have from that time?

• Who was the most influential person in your childhood, and why?

• What was the most memorable holiday you ever took, and why?

• When, if ever, did God become more than word to you, and how did that happen?

• What is one experience of success that you can remember, and what did it mean to you?

• What is one quality from your parents that you wanted to keep, and anything that you wished you could change?

• What has been your most important spiritual experience?

Present-tense questions help us talk about what is going in life right now, and they help us know what people do on a daily basis. Here are some present-tense questions:

• What do you do on a typical Tuesday? When do you get up, what do you during the day, and when do you go to bed?

• What is one part of your life that you enjoy, and one part that is difficult for you?

• What is a good thing happening in your life right now, and what makes it good?

• What do you like to do for fun?
• What are you looking forward to, and what are you reluctant to face in the next week?

• What is a satisfying relationship and/or a frustrating relationship in your life, and what it makes it so?

• What is one thing that gave you joy or a sense of accomplishment this week?

• What is one thing you are proud of about yourself?

Future-tense questions focus on what’s ahead, and what our hopes and dreams are. They risk a little more self-disclosure, and are best reserved for when trust has built in your group.

• If you knew you could not fail, and money was no problem, what one thing would you like to do in the next five years?

• What is one relationship you would like to strengthen, and what steps could you take to develop it?

• What would be the perfect vacation for you? Where would it be, and what would you do?

• What would you like to have said about you at your funeral?

• What is one change you like to make in your life in the next two years, and why?

Affirmation questions invite group members to say positive things about one another, and work well once your group has really begun to know one another. These might be good questions for reflection times during the trip as your team begins to see each other’s strengths and talents.

• What is one quality that you value or admire in one or more members of this group?

• What spiritual gifts do you see present in one or more members of this group? How are those gifts being used in a helpful way?

• What has been meaningful to you in this group?

• What do you value especially about this group?
Debriefing Experiences
This section talks about how to ask questions and lead discussions about the various experiences your team will go through. Debriefing is an important exercise, as it helps us maximize our learning by reflecting on the experiences we just went through. Typically, when we encounter something new or unfamiliar, we experience anxiety. Asking questions and working our way into discussing this anxiety helps us understand our own preconceived notions. The basic mode for this type of debrief is simply called, “What, So What, Now What.”

Basic Guidelines
When facilitating a conversation, there are a few key things to remember:

You are not a teacher right now. This conversation isn’t about you. It’s not about delivering information. Your role in this conversation is to ask questions and help your students probe more deeply into their experiences.

You aren’t the center of what’s happening. This is hard to grasp, and it’s even harder to do. Your role here is step back. You’re facilitating, which means that you are simply providing space for conversation to happen by asking questions.

Eliminate crosstalk. Crosstalk is when people talk over each other. Your more extroverted members may feel fine chatting away, but they may be talking at the expense of the introverts. If you see that someone has cut someone off from talking, stop them, and return to the person who was beginning to speak.

Anxiety can be a good thing. There’s going to be stress following some experiences on your team, but this is a good thing. People will learn a lot about themselves when they encounter stress.

Asking “What?”
Although it may seem unnecessary, or even redundant, asking what is the important first step in debriefing. Each person on your team sees what just happened through their own lens. They will each pick up on unique things that other team members might not have noticed. The questions for this stage are relatively simple. During your experiences, you should take note of how your team members are reacting. Who’s leading? Who’s stressed? Who’s just rolling with the punches? Look at their faces. Listen for the people who are speaking up, and look to see who’s just following orders. Be aware of the emotional states of your team members.

Questions to Ask

- Describe to me what just happened.

- __________________, I noticed that you looked stressed/annoyed/surprised/nervous/excited when ________ happened. Can you tell me what was going on there? What was going through your head?
Asking “So what?”
Once you’ve discussed what happened, you can turn to opinions about what happened. In this stage, you basically ask why this experience is important.

Questions to Ask

-What were your expectations for this experience? What was different from your expectations?
-What did you like or dislike about this experience?
-What did you learn about the people or community we’re working with?
-What did you learn about one another?
-What are some needs of the community?
-Did this project address those needs?
-What impacts the way you view this experience?
-Did you react in a positive or negative way to what you experienced?
-Did this experience cause stress or anxiety in you? What specifically was stressful?
-Do you perceive ___________ differently now?

Asking “Now What?”
This stage of debriefing focuses on how we can move forward from here. The questions are future oriented.

Questions to Ask

-What did you learn from this experience?
-How can you respond more positively to the stressors you encountered today?
-What will you take away from this experience?
-What changes will your altered perspective cause you to make?
Affirmation

Calling attention to the good things that God is doing is an important practice that will help cultivate community in your team. Specifically, you should be on the lookout for ways that God has gifted people on your team. Create a culture where affirmation is the norm.

Affirmation is the process in which we call out good traits, abilities, or gifts that we see in others. This is an important thing to do with your team. Often, we aren’t sure of how the Lord has gifted us. We may be living in complete unawareness of how the Lord has called us to minister to one another. Affirmation and encouragement are important because others tell us what they see the Lord doing in us.

As a team leader, it is important to create a team culture where affirmation is the norm. You play a large role in creating this culture by actively and vocally affirming people on your team. Try to work affirmation in organically during your time together on your trip. A good way to lead into affirming someone is by saying, “__________, I’ve really noticed _________ in you,” or “__________, I really think that God has given you the gift of ____________.” You may feel awkward at saying something so personal to one of your students at first, but it will get easier to have these personal interactions with them the more you do it.

At the end of your trip during your debriefing, it might be a good idea to set aside a time for group affirmation. If you decide to have a time for group affirmation, where members of the team can affirm what they’ve seen God do in one another’s lives, it would be good to tell them that you’re going to do this at the beginning of the trip. This sets them up to be looking for other people’s talents, gifts, and abilities from the get-go. As you affirm people during your trip, your students will be reminded of the importance of affirming others. As you begin your time of debriefing, remind you students of the group affirmation time to come. Once the set-aside time comes to affirm one another, open the floor to your students. It’s ok if you notice that some students are not getting affirmed while others receive lots of affirmation. If you have genuine remarks for those who aren’t getting affirmed, say them; if you don’t, don’t say anything. While it may be difficult for these students to hear others be affirmed while they aren’t, this can serve as a growing point where they can reflect on their own actions. You can also talk about how we don’t work for the affirmation of others, but we work to please God. Even if no one has noticed the things that particular students have done, it’s alright. They can settle in the fact that they have served God while on this trip.
Prayerful Reflection

We can encourage our students to think about the day in a way that’s guided by the Holy Spirit. There are a couple of ways of doing this: one is the lectio practice described in the lectio section, and another way is called the Prayer of Examen. In the Prayer of Examen, we seek to review our day under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The process for the Examen is simple. Take a few minutes, and spend them in silence. Focus your attention on God. If you find that you have a hard time focusing, a simple prayer that you can repeat (such as “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner.”) can help your attention remain on God if you feel your thoughts wandering.

Once you have focused your attention and sat in silence for a minute or two, take the time to notice the points throughout the day where you felt closest to God. This could be anything from times where you felt deeply loved, joyful, or free. You could also have experienced conviction or calling. Then take time to notice the times when you felt furthest from God. These could be times where you felt particularly anxious or burdened.

This practice is helpful for demonstrating that God is indeed involved in our lives, and He is involved in personal ways. What God is doing in the world intersects with our lives on a daily basis. You can utilize this practice to debrief the day, and lead in to a time of sharing. In the time of sharing that could follow this, invite students to share the moments where they felt God’s presence. Ask questions that go deeper into their experiences. In the words of Alice Fryling, “How we respond to the events of our everyday lives is a spiritual journey. In groups and with individuals, questions all the directee to notice the experience of God’s grace and love in very practical, everyday ways.” Debriefing this experience can be a great way to gain some understanding of where your students are on their spiritual journey. Be prepared to ask some questions following their time of prayer.

When asking questions, avoid questions that can simply be answered with a yes or no, such as, “Have you prayed about this?” Questions that begin with why are also not great questions to ask. Fryling gives some good guidelines for asking questions of your students. She says, “Go slowly. Allow for silence in between questions. Be sensitive to the Spirit.”

Here are some good questions to go deeper into what your students share:
- How is your view of God changing because of this experience?
- How would you like God to help you in this?
- What do you think the Spirit of Jesus might be whispering to your spirit in this situation?
- How are you being changed by this relationship or set of circumstances?
- How would you most like God to touch your soul, your inner being, at this time in your life?
Lectio Divina

Put simply, lectio (pronounced lex-ee-o) divina is praying the scriptures; no more, no less. Lectio uses Scripture as a mode for encountering God. Lectio is not Bible study. When we do lectio divina we are not trying to figure out what the author meant, what the cultural context was, or what a certain word means. We are trying to hear God speaking to us through Scripture in a personal way. Lectio is a practice that can be done individually, but it can add a richness to the life of your team.

Prepare
Take a moment to come fully into the present. Sit comfortably alert, close eyes, and focus on your breathing.
1. Hear the word (that is addressed to you)
First reading. Listen for the word or phrase from the passage that attracts you. Repeat it over softly to yourself during a one-minute silence. When the leader gives the signal, say aloud only that word or phrase (without elaboration). Passing is an option.
2. Ask, “How is my life touched?”
Second-stage reading. Listen to discover how this passage touches your life today. Consider possibilities or receive a sensory impression during the two minutes of silence. When the leader gives the signal, speak a sentence or two perhaps beginning with the words I hear, I see, I sense. (Or you may pass)
3. Ask, “Is there an invitation here?”
Third-stage reading. Listen to discover a possible invitation relevant to the next few days. Ponder it during several minutes of silence. When leader gives signal, speak of your sense of invitation. (Or you may pass)
4. Pray (for one another’s empowerment to respond)
Pray, aloud or silently, for God to help the person on your right respond to the invitation received.

If desired, group members may share their feelings about the process after completing these steps.

Passages for Lectio Divina
Matthew 5:13-16
Matthew 11:28-30
Matthew 13:3-8
Matthew 13:31-33
Mark 4:26-28
Mark 11:2-4, 7-9
Luke 3:10-14
Luke 5:4-7
John 15:15-16
Acts 3:4-8
Colossians 3:14-16
Philippians 4:5-8
The process of lectio is simple, but it is effective. First, you must prepare. Select a passage of Scripture to use for the lectio; this passage should not exceed ten verses. Some passage ideas are provided. The Gospels and Psalms make for good lectio readings. If you choose to look for your own passage, look for readings that contain strong images and action words. These are more accessible and easier to use with people who are new to the practice of lectio divina.

Once you have selected your passage, you are ready to begin. Gather your team, and explain the following process to them, taking care to remind them that they will pray for the person on their right after the third stage. Encourage them to relax, and spend a minute or two relaxing into the moment. It can be helpful to close one’s eyes and focus on breathing. Silence, which is favorable for this activity, can be strange or uncomfortable for some of your students, or even yourself. Focusing on one’s breath can be comforting.

The first stage of a lectio divina is to “Hear the Word.” During this stage, you will read the passage of Scripture. Do not read too quickly. This first reading will help team members orient themselves to the passage of Scripture. Before you read, direct your team by saying, “Listen for the word or phrase from the passage that attracts you. Repeat it over softly to yourself during the silence that will follow the reading. When I give you the signal, you may share the word or phrase that stuck out to you, but do not elaborate on the word or phrase.” Read the passage, and then allow for one minute of silence for your team members to meditate on the word. Go around the circle and allow your team to share their word or phrase, but no more than that. They may always have the option to pass.

In the second stage, you will read the passage again. Invite your group to listen for how this passage touches their life today. They may receive an image or impression during this time. They do not have to make sense of how this image connects to the text, they only have to receive it. After the reading, give your team members two minutes of silence to meditate on the image. After the silence, give them the option to share the image or impression that they received, but do not allow elaboration beyond that. Passing, again, is always an option.

In the third stage, we ask, “Is there an invitation for me here today?” Read the text again, and invite your team to think about what invitations God might have for them in the next few days. Give them two to three minutes of silence following the reading, and then invite them to share, but allow them to pass if they feel that they need to.

After your group has had a chance to share, invite them to pray for the person on their right. You may choose for them to do this aloud or silently, depending on how you feel things are going.
If you’re searching for a prayer exercise that is more reflective on the time you’ve been spending on the mission field instead of Scripture, you can do a lectio on life. Instead of praying the Scriptures, we’re praying our lives. Regarding this practice, Norvene Vest states, “Just as we encounter Christ in scripture with a word of strength and hope, so may we encounter Christ in life situations with a transforming word.” This practice could be wonderful as you get deeper into the trip, possibly halfway through the trip so that your team members have a wide variety of trip experiences to reflect on.

The process is fairly similar to lectio divina, but has some modifications to it. The prepare stage is almost the same. Gather your group in a circle, and have them calm themselves down by focusing on their breathing.

In the first stage, invite your team to review the past couple of days. The goal here is to simply recall what has happened in the last few days, and select an event. Perhaps one event will stick out more, but if this isn’t the case, then it’s acceptable to simply select an event for this exercise. The amount of time you should allow for this will vary depending on the time span you’re asking your students to review; if the time span is only one day, then two minutes might be sufficient. If it’s an entire week, you might consider offering four to five minutes for this stage. After the time has drawn to a close, ask the students to share the time of day when the event happened, no more, no less.

In the second stage, have your team recreate the scene they have chosen, paying special attention to the physical details of the scene: sights, smells, colors, and textures. Offer a two minutes for this. After two minutes, have them reconstruct the emotions of the scene. What were they feeling or thinking when the event was happening? Give another two minutes for this task. Now, ask the team to set aside the event they were thinking of for a moment, and just allow their minds to be blank. Vest says, “This setting aside of the memory creates an expectant and receptive interior space into which a word of blessing or consecration is invited. So, with a free-mind, each person allows a phrase or image that seems somehow related to his or her incident to surface in consciousness.” The phrase or image could come from anywhere, and you don’t have to understand why the image enters the mind or how it’s connected to the event. They only have to receive it. Give approximately two minutes for this task. Invite members to share the image or phrase they received, but do not allow elaboration upon the image or phrase. Passing is always an option.

Have your team close their eyes again, and ask them to bring both the incident and image or phrase back to their minds. Now, ask them to image placing the image or phrase and the memory in an offering plate, and giving it up to God. Norvene Vest says, “You offer what was done, what was not done, what might be done - giving all back to the Giver of all things. If anyone needs to hold part back, that is all right; but each tries to give everything connected with the incident and reflection back to God. It might help to exhale deeply, perhaps even loudly, and physically let it out.” This will require about a minute of silence.
After this silence, encourage your team to be receptive to any invitation that might come in response to this. They might receive some insight or encouragement about the incident. Allow them to think about these questions for two to three minutes, and then invite members to share any invitation they might have perceived. Passing is an option. Close with prayer.

After completing this exercise, it might be beneficial to have a conversation about the process of this exercise with your students, and you can invite them to share the incident or memory that they were thinking about. Elaboration is best done after the exercise is over so that people can maintain their focus on their own incident during the exercise.

Using Student Journals

Your students were given a journal before the trip. This journal contains questions for your students to work through every day. You may have provided specific information for these journals so that we could tailor them specifically for your trip.

Please look through these journals to gain insight into what your students are being asked to work through and read through every day. Feel free to use the discussion questions in your daily team meetings. You may have a discussion pre-planned, but if you keep a couple of these questions in mind as you lead your discussions, you won’t have to worry about not having any good questions to ask while you’re leading a team discussion about the day.

Using these questions also helps students gain a more complete understanding of what they’re experiencing on the field, and it also gives you the chance to pour wisdom and insight into the questions that they are wrestling with.