



**Christian Reflection**  
A Series in Faith and Ethics

Study Guides for

# Traveling Well

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to examine the trips we take—for vacation, pilgrimage, retreat, or short-term missions—and consider how we can travel well. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

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**Planning Mission Trips that Matter** 10

Carelessly assembled short-term mission trips may jeopardize long-term ministry and create unhealthy dependencies. But when framed in the context of joining God’s mission and used to nurture spiritual growth, they can be of immense value to God’s kingdom.

**Christian Reflection**  
Institute for Faith and Learning  
Baylor University  
One Bear Place #97270  
Waco, TX 76798-7270  
Phone 1-254-710-4805  
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### Focus Article:

📖 Why We Need a Vacation  
(*Traveling Well*, pp. 11-18)

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# Why We Need a Vacation

When they are done well, personal and family vacations can be a corrective to both our overweening busyness and our fear of creaturely dependency. Moreover, vacations can be a joyful welcome of our grace-filled relationship with God.

### Prayer

No matter where we are, where we are going, or what we are doing, we know that we find our help in you, our Lord.

**In our coming and going, draw near to us and stay.**

We know that you watch over all our living; you have in the past, and we know that you are now.

**In our coming and going, draw near to us and stay.**

Your promise holds for the future and for eternity, and we praise and thank you for that.

**In our coming and going, draw near to us and stay. Amen.**

Scripture Reading: Matthew 18:1-5

### Reflection

“Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) may seem like an unlikely advocate for personal and family vacationing” due to certain “biographical disadvantages,” Karl Aho admits. Kierkegaard “did not marry and start his own family, and rarely journeyed away from his native Copenhagen, Denmark.”

Yet in other ways, Kierkegaard is an apt guide for thinking about the significance of vacations. He is among the first Christian thinkers to reflect on work and leisure from a modern perspective, he usually addresses the topic from a “common man’s” point of view, and he knows well Tivoli, one of the first amusement parks in the world, for it opened in his hometown in 1843.

Drawing on facets of Kierkegaard’s thinking, Aho discerns several ways that taking vacations can help us grow spiritually.

- ▶ *We resist the vice of busyness.* Bustling activity can distract us from our calling “to grow into the loving, productive selves that God intends for us to be.” Aho notes that becoming these selves, for Kierkegaard, is “both a gift and a task – something we receive from God and others, and something we achieve through our attentiveness to it as a project. When we are lazy or slothful, we do not pursue this calling because it seems difficult. When we are consumed by busyness, we pursue too many other, less important things instead.” Of course, we may be inadvertently sidetracked from our relationships with God and others by the pressure of events, but sometimes we wrongly seek out and welcome distractions.

Is the remedy simply to vacation with family and friends? Aho warns us to not take busyness with us. “I struggle with doing too much during vacations,” he admits. “I want to see too many sights or visit too many people. That is a recipe for avoiding true, lasting connections with my fellow travelers, the places we go, and the new people we meet there.”

- ▶ *We wisely welcome our dependence.* Kierkegaard imagines a rather self-sufficient, prosperous fellow who knows he needs to slow down and rest, but dithers each day about going to Tivoli because he fears it reveals a shameful weakness. Aho suggests a more faithful response would be to accept “one’s need for diversions



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and acknowledge one's dependence on them – and on the God who created human beings with such needs and who makes such diversions available."

So, when is taking a vacation appropriate, rather than a frivolous indulgence or harmful distraction? "We should evaluate potential vacations according to the real needs and lasting desires of all concerned, rather than their whims or inclinations," Aho advises, and then "welcome our vacations as expressions of our human dependence on God."

► *We learn to experience deep joy.* For Kierkegaard, all human beings are "equal before God in the sense that divine grace is offered to every imperfect person – 'that is, to everyone.' Beyond worthily accepting God's grace, nothing further is required of us for salvation," Aho explains. "When we accept God's gracious welcome, the great pressure to make ourselves happy by ourselves is removed. Relieved of this onerous chore, we can finally relax and rejoice in the world in general, and in the love of friends and family in particular."

Aho concludes, "we should vacation with family and friends not only because vacations provide a counterbalance to the busyness of our lives and because our human finitude requires us to pursue diversions, but because our God-relationship frees us to enjoy God's good creation with them. To rejoice in our families and friends and, through their companionship, in the wonders of creation is a deep gladness that God intends for us."

### Study Questions

1. How, according to Søren Kierkegaard, is becoming the self that God intends for us to be "both a gift and a project"?
2. How can personal and family vacations be spiritually good for us? Do vacations need to be costly to be good?
3. Why does Kierkegaard deride "travel around the world to see rivers and mountains, new stars, flamboyant birds, freakish fish, ludicrous breeds of humanity" – exactly the sort of grand-sightseeing tour that fills glossy travel magazines? Consider what sort of vacation he would prefer, and why.
4. If you recall a wonderful personal or family vacation, consider why it is so special in your memory. What made it so restful, a great gift, or an encounter with joy?
5. In Matthew 18:1-5, what spiritual qualities of children does Jesus commend to his disciples? How would these prepare them to truly enjoy a vacation?

### Departing Hymn: "Simple Gifts"

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,  
'tis the gift to come down where we ought to be;  
and when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'twill be in the valley of love and delight.  
When true simplicity is gained,  
to bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed;  
to turn, turn will be our delight  
till by turning, turning we come 'round right.

Joseph Brackett (1797-1882)

Tune: SIMPLE GIFTS



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### Focus Article:

- 📖 The Discipline of Christian Pilgrimage  
(*Traveling Well*, pp. 19-27)

### Suggested Articles:

- 📖 On Pilgrimage in Italy  
(*Traveling Well*, pp. 74-78)
- 📖 Toward a Theology of Pilgrimage  
(*Traveling Well*, pp. 89-93)

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# The Discipline of Christian Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is rooted in the soil of the human soul. This intentional mode of travel has been practiced through the centuries by Christians who are seeking to stretch their faith radically by discovering the God who invites us into sacred and risky intimacy.

### Prayer

O Lord, we long for the day when our feet will stand within the gates of the New Jerusalem. Until then, as we journey toward home, guide and protect your church. Bind us in unity, clothe us in truth, and keep us in peace.

We pray in the strong name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

### Scripture Reading: Hebrews 11:8-16

### Reflection

Pilgrimage typically involves traveling to places that are closely associated – through art, architecture, or a saint’s life – with God’s mission in the world. In its essence, “pilgrimage is a journey nearer to the heart of God and deeper into life with God,” Eric Howell explains. “The hope of all pilgrimage is realized when we have renewed eyes to be happily surprised by God’s mysterious presence in all times and places, even at home.”

After sketching the history of this practice, Christian George commends pilgrimage for Christians of all ages and abilities, “as a spiritual discipline that reflects our journey to God, that gives great energy to our sanctification, and that engenders a spiritual vitality that is both Christo-centric and community-driven.”

- ▶ *The history of Christian pilgrimage* draws on biblical travels to the festivals at the Second Temple in Jerusalem (537 bc-ad 70). Peter describes all believers as pilgrims (1 Peter 2:11), for they join Abraham’s walk toward a city built by God.

Christian George notes, “By the time Constantine’s mother, Empress Helena, brought pilgrimage into vogue by traveling to the Holy Land in 326, a living tradition of *sancta loca*, or holy places, pertaining to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ had already materialized.”

Detractors from Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-c. 395) to the Protestant Reformers criticized the physical dangers and spiritual excesses of pilgrimage, yet the practice flourished in the medieval period and revived in the eighteenth century. Great European cathedrals, sites of martyrdom, and places where notable saints had served were added to the list of destinations. Even the Puritans, who objected most to the corruptions of pilgrimage, nevertheless “embraced biblical precedents like Abraham’s journey, Israel’s Exodus, and the sacred travels of the Magi, giving great exegetical and homiletical attention to the pilgrim psalms 120-134, Christ’s infant journey to Egypt, and New Testament passages like these.”

- ▶ *Pilgrimage today* “to places like Iona, Taizé, Skellig Michael, Mont St. Michelle, Mount Athos, Assisi, Jerusalem, and Rome...can serve as a unifying commonality among Christians of every denomination and tradition, [which] fosters reconciliation and ecumenism,” George notes. Anyone can practice the discipline of pilgrimage – children seeking to concretize their faith, young people hiking across Europe,



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or adults seeking spiritual renewal. “Those who cannot travel — the elderly, the poor, the hospitalized, or those with physical disabilities” practice pilgrimage by setting the Lord always before them. He explains, “some of the greatest pilgrimages I have ever taken have been in the midnight moments of my life, the hospital moments when I opened up the Bible and traveled to Jericho, where the walls came tumbling down. As an armchair pilgrim, I went to Egypt and saw the Red Sea stand up for God’s people to march through.”

“The discipline of pilgrimage reminds us to slow down and take life one step at a time. It reminds us that life is an emotional, physical, and spiritual journey that requires upward and inward conditioning. It moves us from certainty to dependency, from confidence to brokenness, from assurance in ourselves to faith in God,” George concludes. “A regular diet of spiritual disciplines like pilgrimage can splash our dehydrated Christianity with fresh faith and gives us a greater hunger for the holy.”

### Study Questions

1. According to Christian George, how has the discipline of Christian pilgrimage evolved through the centuries?
2. In what ways can the discipline of pilgrimage be valuable for one’s discipleship today?
3. What destinations for pilgrimage seem most worthwhile to you at this stage of your discipleship?
4. Discuss N. T. Wright’s view that a pilgrimage can be “a metaphor, even a sacrament, for and of the pilgrim’s progress through the present life to the life that is to come.”

### Departing Hymn: “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah”

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,  
pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but thou art mighty —  
hold me with thy powerful hand;  
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,  
feed me till I want no more,  
feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain,  
whence the healing stream doth flow;  
let the fire and cloudy pillar  
lead me all my journey through;  
Strong Deliverer, Strong Deliverer,  
be thou still my strength and shield,  
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
bid my anxious fears subside;  
bear me through the swelling current,  
land me safe on Canaan’s side;  
songs of praises, songs of praises  
I will ever give to thee,  
I will ever give to thee.

*William Williams (1745); translated by William Williams and Peter Williams (1771), alt.*

*Tune: CWM RHONDDA*



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### Focus Article:

📖 Divine Hours Spent  
Hiking with God  
(*Traveling Well*, pp. 28-37)

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# Divine Hours Spent Hiking with God

If you want to know where you are going, it helps to know where you are. As Cindy Crosby began to truly look, listen, and see what was in front of her on her hikes, she learned the language of tallgrass prairie, the language of her new home. And she discovered, as Belden Lane puts it, “The wildest, most dangerous trails are always the ones within.”

### Prayer

Lord, you are the creator and sustainer of all that is. And yet, the immensity of creation does not distract you from caring personally for every creature in it.

**In our coming and going, draw near to us and stay.**

You do not daydream or become weary in that care. We thank you for watching over us with diligence, and for guiding us so that we do not stumble or fall.

**In our coming and going, draw near to us and stay. Amen.**

Scripture Reading: Psalm 95:1-6

### Meditation†

The mockingbird took a single step into the air and dropped. His wings were still folded against his sides as though he were singing from a limb and not falling, accelerating thirty-two feet per second per second, through empty air. Just a breath before he would have been dashed to the ground, he unfurled his wings with exact, deliberate care, revealing the broad bars of white, spread his elegant, white-banded tail, and so floated onto the grass. I had just rounded a corner when his insouciant step caught my eye; there was no one else in sight. The fact of his free fall was like the old philosophical conundrum about the tree that falls in the forest. The answer must be, I think, that beauty and grace are performed whether or not we will or sense them. The least we can do is try to be there.

Annie Dillard

### Reflection

Since she so loved the beautiful landscapes of the natural world, Cindy Crosby “moped around the first few months, regretting the move,” when her husband’s work took them to live in the suburbs of Chicago. The subdivision’s manicured uniformity and the corn monoculture of surrounding farms left her hungering for the loveliness and majesty of wild places.

As she walked around her neighborhood (just to ‘get away’), she looked at things more closely. The travel distance was short, but the destination changed her: Crosby was captivated by remnants of tall-grass prairie. The change of perspective this brought to her vision and heart occurred by stages.

- ▶ *She discovered the intertwined natural and human history of the place where she lived* – vast grasslands which isolated pioneer families had encountered, which spurred John Deere’s agricultural invention, and, in turn, were almost lost forever.
- ▶ *She came to love the diverse plants and animals, permanent and migratory, that share the place with her* – waves of sandhill cranes dancing northward in the March sky, western chorus frogs crying out in the woods,



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and a kaleidoscope of perennials like prairie dropseed, rattlesnake master, and pasque flower emerging from the ashes of a burned prairie.

- ▶ *She learned to care for the prairie with other volunteers, setting prescribed burns that mimic the lightning fires necessary for the grassland's survival, but long suppressed by humans.*
- ▶ *She became aware of tragic consequences of careless treatment of the land by humans—how the American elm and ash were lost to blights exacerbated by suburban monoculture. So, she welcomed a more diverse ecosystem around her backyard pond.*

Why do Crosby and the other volunteers care so much for the tallgrass prairie? "Some enjoy socializing outdoors. Some care about environmental issues. Others come out for a day to pull tall, sweet white clover or clear brush because they love the exercise outdoors. Some fall in love with the prairie," she writes. "I come to the prairie for all those reasons, plus another. The prairie is where I hike and feel closest to God."

"God is invisible, often silent," Crosby admits. "But the tallgrass is always there, waiting, evidence that I am not forgotten. Willoway Brook runs fast with snowmelt in the spring, with clouds of ebony jewelwing damselflies in the summer, and ladies tresses orchids in the fall. I try to be there to be astonished. To bear witness. And to listen...just in case."

### Study Questions

1. Develop a plan to learn more about the place where you live—the natural history of its plants, animals, landforms, and waterways; the weather patterns and seasons; the visibility of stars; and how well people have cared for the area through their industries and agriculture.
2. Consider the features of the place where you live that constantly draw you to God. Do some features occlude experiencing God's presence? Where do you travel in that place "to bear witness" to its beauty and grace and "to listen" for God?
3. Plan a short travel experience—a neighborhood walk or longer hike, a book to read or photos to enjoy—to share with a friend the beauty and grace of the place where you live.

### Departing Hymn: "For the Beauty of the Earth" (vv. 1, 2)

For the beauty of the earth,  
for the glory of the skies,  
for the love which from our birth  
over and around us lies,  
*Lord of all, to you we raise  
this, our hymn of grateful praise.*

For the wonder of each hour  
of the day and of the night,  
hill and vale and tree and flower,  
sun and moon and stars of light,  
*Lord of all, to you we raise  
this, our hymn of grateful praise.*

*Folliott S. Pierpoint* (1864), alt.  
Tune: DIX

† Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition (New York: HarperCollins, 2013 [1974]), 10.



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### Focus Article:

- 📖 Meeting God (Again)  
in Spiritual Retreat  
(*Traveling Well*, pp. 38-46)

### Suggested Articles:

- 📖 An Evening Walk  
(*Traveling Well*, pp. 70-71)
- 📖 Joined by Christ  
on the Path  
(*Traveling Well*, pp. 72-73)

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# Meeting God (Again) in Spiritual Retreat

Spiritual retreat equips a serious seeker of God to find God in daily life. We can experience retreat in many ways. We give up grading how it went by our standards of evaluation and simply trust that our efforts will produce the fruit we need, perhaps not from our perspective, but from God's.

### Prayer

O Lord, we long for the day when our feet will stand within the gates of the New Jerusalem.  
Until then, as we journey toward home, guide and protect your church. Bind us in unity, clothe us in truth, and keep us in peace.  
We pray in the strong name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

### Scripture Reading: Luke 24:13-35

### Meditation†

We *shouldn't* have problems with fatigue or depression or anger or control or abandonment. No dysfunction *should* ripple into our families. Our jobs *should* be advancing or at least stable and preparing us for retirement. We *should* be bursting with love for everyone, be perfectly married or living joyfully though single. We *should* be living a victorious, effortless and powerful life.

Our "shoulds" and their accompanying guilt exhaust us. And I don't know a single person living like that.... A personal retreat allows us room to be honest with God about how imperfect we are, how disillusioned we are about our life and our inability to live holy and wholly this side of heaven.

*Jane Rubietta*

### Reflection

"The idea of going away on a spiritual retreat is at odds with the American culture in which achieving, accomplishing, and acquiring are the rules of the road," Jeanie Miley admits. Yet this form of travel allows us "to draw apart, unplug, disconnect, and pause in order to advance in the personal quest to meet God and deepen the relationship with this Mystery. Taking the time to disengage from routine and participate in retreat provides inner resources that reprioritize the multiple quests of daily life."

Miley describes the richness of three kinds of spiritual retreat.

- ▶ *A silent retreat in solitude* can be "radically transforming and empowering," Miley reports. "It is in the silence that we can hear the chatter in our own heads and sift and sort through the various pulls on our attentions and affections enough to finally be open more fully to the presence of the still, small voice of the Living God. In placing oneself in the atmosphere and attitude of meeting God, it is often possible to get a new perspective on old problems and to see with clearer eyes." She commends meditative walking and repetitive physical activities (she takes her needlepoint), which "free the brain from its attachment to rational, logical ruminations and incessant planning, analyzing, and critiquing, and engage the more intuitive, creative, spontaneous part of the brain."



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“While it is good to have a stated intention of meeting God on retreat, it is important to hold that intention with a light touch,” she notes. “One should not be overly anxious about when God might show up and how, and while an ecstatic experience might be wonderful, putting God to the test of how and when and what he might do boxes God in and reveals our own need to control.” The silence and solitude of retreat overflow with value to others, for “there is a correlation between being comfortable alone with God and yourself and being involved in a healthy way in a community.”

- ▶ *Retreats with peers in one’s church family or gathered from faraway places* may involve planned activities like hearing the wisdom of teachers, processing their presentations in small groups, resting and recreating in nature, and experiencing silence together. Such retreats provide opportunities “to meet God in each other, to see each other with increased understanding and, hopefully, compassion,” she notes. “In a myriad of ways we lend not only our minds out to each other, but our hearts and our hands, our shared quests for God, and the moments when God met us with his love.”
- ▶ *Family retreats* are invaluable for adults and children “to gather at a place where fun is provided in age-appropriate activities, to meet together in large groups for worship, and to see each other in relaxed settings, seeking a more meaningful relationship with God.” Such retreats model how families “can set aside time on vacations to orient children toward the idea of meeting God.”

“It does not matter if I am going away on a retreat to fill my own cup or to facilitate a retreat for others, I return refreshed and restored,” Miley concludes. “Meeting God in retreat with the focused intention and stated purpose of nurturing the daily practice of the presence of God has a way of preparing our minds and hearts to be open to experiencing God in the ordinary, the mundane, and even the difficult and tragic.”

### Study Questions

1. Discuss what the three types of spiritual retreat described by Jeanie Miley share in common. Why, according to Miley, is this sort of travel especially valuable for our discipleship?
2. Have you enjoyed one of these types of spiritual retreat? What type of retreat would be most attractive and valuable to you at this point in your discipleship?
3. In *Jesus and His Disciples on Their Way to Bethany*, how does Henry Ossawa Tanner depict Christ’s relationship with his disciples? What is the significance of the biblical theme that they ‘retreated’ each evening from Jerusalem to Bethany?
4. Compare the interpretations of Luke 24:13-35 in Lelio Orsi’s painting, *The Walk to Emmaus*, and David Music’s hymn text, “While on the Long Emmaus Road.” How does this biblical story serve as an emblem of the spiritual retreats commended by Jeanie Miley?

### Departing Hymn: “While on the Long Emmaus Road” (vv. 1, 2, 3, and 5)

† Jane Rubietta, *Resting Place: A Personal Guide to Spiritual Retreats* (InterVarsity Press, 2005), 10-11.



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### Focus Article:

- 📖 Planning Mission Trips that Matter  
(*Traveling Well*, pp. 47-54)

### Suggested Articles:

- 📖 Enroute to Home  
(*Traveling Well*, pp. 79-83)
- 📖 Resources for Short-Term Missions  
(*Traveling Well*, pp. 84-88)

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# Planning Mission Trips that Matter

Carelessly assembled short-term mission trips jeopardize long-term ministry and create unhealthy dependencies. But framed in the context of joining God's mission and used to nurture spiritual growth, they can be of immense value to God's kingdom.

### Prayer

No matter where we are, where we are going, or what we are doing, we know that we find our help in you, our Lord.

**In our coming and going, draw near to us and stay.**

Your promise holds for the future and for eternity, and we praise and thank you for that.

**In our coming and going, draw near to us and stay. Amen.**

### Scripture Reading: Luke 10:1-16

### Meditation†

Short-term missions have become a part of the fabric of our contemporary religious and social landscapes.... I believe the phenomenon emerges from a deep search for meaning arising out of a discontent with American culture and postindustrial capitalism. We seem to have a collective desire to do something meaningful in a way that doesn't seem possible in our day-to-day lives. This yearning has come together with cheap and accessible transportation and an awareness of conditions elsewhere in the world, facilitated by media and the immediacy of the news cycle. It emerges from an admirable impulse to help, to give, to sacrifice, for the well-being of others.

*Laurie Occhipinti*

### Reflection

"Throughout the Bible, kingdom service and spiritual growth often go hand-in-hand," Curt Kruschwitz notes. "Spiritual formation... does not happen in formal classroom settings. Instead, it happens as Israelites and Christ's disciples are led to engage the world and to reflect on their real-life experiences in light of their faith. In other words, as God's people engage their neighbors in God's name, God uses those experiences to form them."

This biblical pattern of spiritual formation through mission may happen today through the short-term mission (STM) trips which are increasingly popular in congregations. But such trips must avoid these common pitfalls identified by researchers:

- ▶ hurting the established local ministry due to STM participants' lack of cultural sensitivity
- ▶ perpetuating patriarchal attitudes among Westerners used to a higher standard of living
- ▶ wasting financial resources that could be better used by the host communities
- ▶ having unrealistic expectations due to a "bottom-line, results-oriented" approach
- ▶ focusing on short-term fixes instead of long-term solutions
- ▶ creating dependency and stunting long-term growth within the host communities



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Given all these pitfalls, Kruschwitz says “it is not surprising that many missiologists and church leaders have asked, ‘Is STM worth it?’” Yet he and other researchers are optimistic that better prepared STM teams can avoid or mitigate these problems.

He begins by naming the trips “Mission Formation Experiences” in order to “shift the focus away from *what we can do* to help our hosts to *how God can form us and our hosts* as we serve God together. We are joining God’s mission around the world, trusting that as we serve in God’s name, God’s Spirit will form our hosts and our team more into God’s image.” And instead of a more typical one- or two-week experience, participants commit to a months-long process of pre-trip meetings, nightly debriefings during the trip, and post-trip reflection gatherings.

In the pre-trip phase, leaders focus on “what God is already doing in our host’s community” rather than “what we can offer.” Kruschwitz explains, “we encourage participants to think about ways their lives can fit into God’s grand mission to rescue humanity and redeem the world. Thinking about the trip in terms of joining God’s work helps combat the inevitable ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ sentiments that easily develop among participants.”

Nightly sessions during the trip help participants reflect scripturally and theologically on their “heightened alertness to God’s activity in their lives.” A curriculum based on Luke 10 “highlights the interrelated roles of prayer, community, hospitality, and courage in witness.” Questions like “How did you see God working today? What did you learn about God, yourself, or humankind today? What is God calling you to do next?” lead participants to study Scripture more carefully and relate its truths to their lives, both on the trip and when they return home.

At each post-trip gathering, participants share “a picture that reminds them of how God worked, something that reminds them of a spiritual lesson they learned, or a written statement about how their life fits into God’s mission.” Kruschwitz observes, “As participants remember how God worked in their lives during the Mission Formation Experience, they often consider how that same God invites them to serve, study, and follow God in their hometown.”

### Study Questions

1. Why do you think short-term mission (STM) experiences have become so popular in recent years?
2. Under what conditions, according to Curt Kruschwitz, can STM experiences be of immense value to God’s kingdom? How can they be valuable to the spiritual growth of both participants and members of the host communities?
3. Discuss the common pitfalls of STM trips. Do these problems result from leaders and participants’ motivations, lack of preparation, cultural differences from host communities, or from some other cause?
4. Evaluate your experiences on STM trips in light of these values and pitfalls. What would you do differently next time?
5. For Matthew Waller, how have experiences as a missionary kid, STM trip participant, and agricultural missionary been valuable in his current lifework as a journalist?

### Departing Hymn: “While on the Long Emmaus Road” (vv. 1, 2, 4, and 5)

† Laurie A. Occhipinti, *Making a Difference in a Globalized World: Short-term Missions that Work* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 4-5.

# Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

# Why We Need a Vacation

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 2 and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To consider how personal and family vacations can be spiritually good and necessary for us.
2. To learn how to plan such spiritually refreshing vacations.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Traveling Well (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Simple Gifts” locate the familiar folk tune SIMPLE GIFTS in your church’s hymnal or on the Web.

## Begin with a Story

When I was a child, my family very much enjoyed traveling together, but getting away for a vacation was difficult. Dad was the minister of a large congregation, and just before we left home or in the middle of our trip, some church member would fall gravely ill or pass away, and Dad would return for ministerial duty. Our carefully planned, two-week vacations inevitably were cut short by several days.

I had hoped to escape such disappointments after I married and began to travel with my wife’s family, but it was not the case. My father-in-law was too important to the railroad he worked for. When cell phones became available in 1983, he picked up a Motorola unit that looked like a white brick sporting an antenna and cost \$4,000. The calling minutes were not cheap either. That cell phone was a mixed blessing. He no longer had to search for a suitably private pay phone to call the office twice a day. However, the “brick” might ring anywhere and anytime, forcing us to stop the car where the cellular signal was strong so that he could talk business for an hour or more, while the rest of us whiled away the time with quiet conversations or naps. My mother-in-law once threatened to heave the cell phone out the window.

Undoubtedly my dad and father-in-law wanted to relax with and enjoy their families on vacation, and they knew something was wrong when they couldn’t. In this study, Karl Aho reconstructs some theological reasons why we need a vacation. Hopefully those can help us do better.

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by inviting members to read aloud responsively the prayer in the study guide.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Matthew 18:1-5 from a modern translation.

## Reflection

What does it mean to travel well? It depends, of course, on the kind of traveling we are doing. This study considers what it means to travel well on personal or family vacations. Karl Aho assumes the goals of vacationing include physical rest, spiritual restoration, and enjoyment of deepening relationships – with the family and friends who accompany us, the people we meet, the places we visit on our travels, and the God who created us for such joy. In the writings of Søren Kierkegaard, Aho identifies two spiritual attitudes that frustrate our achieving those goals: our overweening busyness and fear of creaturely dependence.

### *Study Questions*

1. Begin by listing the many resources human beings need in order to become the loving, productive self that God intends for them to be – mental and physical capacities, the care of nurturing families and loving friends, a healthy physical environment, adequate education, work opportunities, and so on. All of these are gifts. Yet they do not automatically produce loving, productive selves. Each person must welcome others' care, preserve and use environmental resources wisely, take advantage of opportunities one receives, and so on.
2. Drawing from Søren Kierkegaard's writings, Karl Aho discusses two spiritual goods that we can gain from a vacation: a lessening of the grip of the vice of busyness, and an acknowledgement and welcoming of our dependence on other people and on restful, entertaining diversions. Of course, we will be tempted to take our busyness and bossy self-sufficiency with us on our trips; when we do, our vacations might make us worse!

Encourage members to name other spiritual goods they have enjoyed on vacations: meeting new friends, enjoying the beauty of God's creation, learning more about another culture, drawing closer to traveling companions, seeing familiar places through others' eyes, and so on. How can we plan our travels in order to enjoy these good things? Ask members to select one of these good things and imagine an inexpensive vacation that can deliver that good.

3. Kierkegaard derides traveling merely for the sake of observing spectacle. Aho explains, "Such travel objectively serves as a splendid diversion, but fails in the more important inward movement of acknowledging one's dependence." Also, such travel could have wrong motives – to show off one's wealth, brag "I've been there," and so on.

What sort of personal or family vacation might Kierkegaard recommend? First, it would not divert us from the task of becoming the loving, productive selves that God wants us to be, and, second, it might help us engage in that task. Its appropriate diversions would be welcome as a sign of our dependence on God and others. They would (at least) leave us rested and restored for the work we are called to do; they might enrich our lives and make us better persons by helping us know more about ourselves, form deeper relationships with others, appreciate and care for God's wonderful creation, and so on.

4. Invite members to describe their especially wonderful personal or family vacations. Use the template of goods discussed by Aho (or the longer list that members developed in response to question two) to reflect on why those vacations were so memorably pleasing.
5. In contrast to the disciples, the children whom Jesus commends are humble (Matthew 18:4). They are not preoccupied or overly concerned about their status or rank. Humility is a corrective to inordinate status-seeking. It undermines a status-chaser's busyness and desire for self-sufficiency. It helps us admit our limits (to ourselves and others), rest (when it's appropriate), and welcome our need for relationship and shared time with others.

### *Departing Hymn*

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

# The Discipline of Christian Pilgrimage

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>	<i>Dual Session (#1)</i>	<i>Dual Session (#2)</i>
Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)	Introduce the practice of pilgrimage	Plan a pilgrimage for your group
Questions 2 and 3	Questions (selected)	Questions 1 and 2	Questions 3 and 4
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To sketch the history of Christian pilgrimage through the centuries.
2. To consider the ways a pilgrimage can be valuable for one's discipleship.
3. To help members plan a pilgrimage that they might take individually, share with family or friends, or share as a group.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Traveling Well (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah," locate the tune CWM RHONDDA in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ ([www.hymntime.com/tch/](http://www.hymntime.com/tch/)) or Hymnary.org ([www.hymnary.org](http://www.hymnary.org)).

## Begin with a Story

"Pilgrimage runs thickly through my veins," Christian George admits. "My parents named me for a pilgrim—Christian, the main character in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. For years I traveled the world, seeing how God intervened in time and space to accomplish his will through the lives of men and women who took seriously their faith. From monastery to monastery, I traversed the globe, chanting with monks at Taizé, France; climbing the staircase of Skellig Michael, Ireland; and walking up the breezy hills of Iona, Scotland.

"These pilgrimages made the past come alive. I saw the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt, Germany, where Martin Luther wrestled with Scripture; the Orthodox monastery of Penteli, Greece, where monks taught children to read and write; and the Franciscan monastery of Montelucio in Spoleto, Italy, where Saint Francis fasted and prayed.

"Being a pilgrim gave me a three-dimensional picture of God's interaction in this world. These journeys taught me that Christians were made for motion—progressing in our relationship with Christ, overcoming obstacles that rust our faith, and gaining stamina to battle the world, the flesh, and the devil. Most of all, they showed me that in order best to navigate the future, we need to travel back into the past." (*Traveling Well*, p. 19)

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by inviting members to read aloud together the prayer in the study guide.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Hebrews 11:13-16 from a modern translation.

## Reflection

This study introduces the discipline of Christian pilgrimage. For some members, this will be an opportunity to recall and share their pilgrimage experiences, and to consider how those travels continue to shape their discipleship. For other members, it will be an occasion to explore a new discipline, weigh its value for their spiritual growth, and discuss concerns they may have about the abuse of pilgrimage.

If the group would like to extend this study, schedule a second session to plan a short pilgrimage event that

your group can share. Eric Howell's *On Pilgrimage in Italy* provides an example of how to plan a pilgrimage, and the resources reviewed in John Gatta's *Toward A Theology of Pilgrimage* will help members choose a destination and prepare spiritually for their travels together.

### **Study Questions**

1. Over the centuries both the destinations and purposes for Christian pilgrimage expanded. In the early centuries Christian pilgrims mainly went to Jerusalem and the Holy Land to experience for themselves the places associated with Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

In the medieval era additional destinations became popular – places associated with saints' relics, shrines for martyrs, sites of miraculous healing, and great church buildings with inspiring art and architecture. Motives also expanded during this time to include seeking physical healing for oneself or one's children, doing penance for sin, and gaining indulgences that were thought to reduce after-death punishment. George notes that Protestant leaders like Luther and Calvin strongly criticized such motives for pilgrimage and "posited a grace-based righteousness over against a salvifically meritorious expression of faith." In Protestant countries, opposition to pilgrimage became a badge for protesting the corruptions of the Roman papacy.

Puritan theologians drew on biblical stories to employ pilgrimage as a metaphor for every Christian's walk of discipleship. More recently, advances in travel and increased wealth have made pilgrimage possible for more Christians.

2. Christian George mentions that pilgrimage gives "a three-dimensional picture of God's interaction in this world"; as Eric Howell puts it, "there's nothing like actually being there" in the place where God has acted decisively. Pilgrimage helped George understand Christian life as a journey toward God and with God. Pilgrimage can "foster reconciliation and ecumenism" as it "exposes us to different [Christian] traditions that inform our thinking. Ours becomes a kaleidoscopic Christianity, and we see reality through sacred lenses, lenses that put flesh on faith and bones on Bibles," George adds. Howell emphasizes that pilgrimage can give us "renewed eyes to be happily surprised by God's mysterious presence in all times and places, even at home."

In *The Way of the Lord*, N. T. Wright notes how pilgrims become aware of the brokenness of the world, even in those places where God's actions have been so evident. This increased awareness can foster "a time of real growth and depth in discipleship" and be a "stimulus and an invitation to prayer" (10). Invite members to share the impact that their pilgrimage travels have made on their discipleship.

3. Encourage members to consider a variety of destinations closely associated – through art, architecture, or a saint's life – with God's mission in the world. Some of these may be world-famous and of significance to Christians of many traditions. Others will have local significance (to the Christian mission in your region of the country, to your denomination, etc.). Still other destinations will have personal or family significance (where a family member or loved one was baptized, experienced a call to ministry, was healed, etc.). Ask members to explain why their destination is significant at this stage of their discipleship.

Members might plan a pilgrimage that they can share as a group. Or, they might plan a pilgrimage that they can share with someone who cannot physically travel – for example, through books, documentaries, Internet resources, or personal photos and recollections.

4. The scripture reading and departing hymn use pilgrimage as a metaphor for our life of discipleship. A pilgrimage becomes a sacrament as God uses it to guide, restore, and encourage us in our progress through this life.

### **Departing Hymn**

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

# Divine Hours Spent Hiking with God

## Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 2 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To (re)discover and share with others more of the created beauty and grace of the place where one lives.
2. To value attentively traveling, both physically and by study, through the place where we live.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Traveling Well (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "For the Beauty of the Earth," locate the familiar tune DIX in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ ([www.hymntime.com/tch/](http://www.hymntime.com/tch/)) or Hymnary.org ([www.hymnary.org](http://www.hymnary.org)).

## Begin with Some Questions

"Do you know where you are?" Steven Bouma-Prediger asks his readers at the beginning of *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (2001, 2010). "What is the soil like around your home? Silty loam? Loamy sand? Sandy clay? Rocks and pebbles? Wet or dry? A few precious inches of soil atop ancient Canadian shield, or eighteen inches of rich, fertile gardener's gold? What are five agricultural plants in your region? Corn, wheat, alfalfa, beans, sorghum? Or maybe grapes or cherries or oranges? And how long is the growing season? A precious few weeks? Or all year long? What geological events or processes have influenced the land where you live? Glaciers, volcanoes, earthquakes? Uplifting mountains or rivers carving canyons to the sea? What confluence of water and wind?"

In this amazing passage, Bouma-Prediger goes on to ask details about the trees that live where nearby, the birds that are resident and migratory, the flowers that bloom and when, the animals that share one's place, the stage of the moon last night, and the constellations that were visible in the sky. "From what direction do the prevailing winds blow? From where does your water come? To where does your garbage go?" (*For the Beauty of the Earth*, 2-3).

Knowing where we are in this way, with what he calls an "ecological perception of place," enables us to love more deeply and care more effectively for God's creation. It also helps us appreciate God's love for us and receive God's daily care. Walking our own neighborhood with careful attention to the creation and the Creator may be the most important traveling we do. In this study, Cindy Crosby's trekking is an example of such traveling well.

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by inviting members to read aloud responsively the prayer in the study guide.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Psalm 95:1-6 from a modern translation.

## Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

## Reflection

In order to experience the beauty and grace of God's creation, and be drawn by it into deeper love with our Creator, we need not travel great distances to unusual and majestic landscapes. The examples of Cindy Crosby and Annie Dillard, the poetry of the Psalmist, and the hymn of Folliott Pierpoint remind us that we only need to look around us with wonder and attention. Use this study to value and plan those short trips into nature that can draw us to love God and to care better for the places where we live.

### *Study Questions*

1. Encourage members to share their varying interests in and knowledge about the different facets of the place where you live. What drew them to that particular facet, and how did they become interested and knowledgeable about it? What resources – books, Internet sites, local experts, environmental groups, history clubs, and so on – would they recommend to others who share their interest?

Form small groups based on a few of your members' varying interests, and ask them to form a plan – a walk, a book to share, an expert to interview, a service project, and so on – to develop their knowledge of and nurture their care for the place where they live.

2. Ask members if they have a favorite place nearby that they go to experience the beauty and grace of God's creation and to draw near to God. Perhaps it is a retreat in their home, a local park, or a neighborhood walk. What features of that place – its plants and animals, seasonal changes and migrations, times of day, dark night sky, solitude, human interactions, personal memories, vistas, landforms, waterways, architecture, and so on – draw them to God?

Are there features of the place where you live which make it more difficult to experience the presence of God? It might be excessive or unpleasant noise, hideous architecture, environmental damage from careless agriculture or industry, light pollution, unsafe streets, a distasteful personal or cultural history in the area, and so on. How do members look past these features, block them out temporarily, or work to correct them?

3. Part of the joy of recognizing God through the beauty and grace of God's creation is sharing this experience with others – family members, a few friends, guests on vacation, a group of neighborhood children, a curious young person, a person with restricted ability to travel, and so on. We not only help and encourage them, but we also see our place in a fresh way through their eyes and come to love more aspects of it.

With some particular individual or group in mind, begin planning a short travel experience for them to learn more about and enjoy the place where you live. How will you share the beauty and grace that you have experienced there? How will you prepare their hearts to encounter the Creator in that place?

### *Departing Hymn*

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

# Meeting God (Again) in Spiritual Retreat

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To outline the common goals and the various types of Christian spiritual retreat.
2. To consider the value of each type of spiritual retreat for our discipleship.
3. To interpret the Emmaus story in Luke 24:13-35 as an emblem of spiritual retreat.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Traveling Well (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting.

## Begin with a Story

"Often, a retreat is a chance to get away from routine and hear stimulating or inspirational speakers, get better acquainted with others in a relaxed environment, and participate in games and other forms of recreation," Jeanie Miley explains. "Those forms of retreats are still enjoyable and meaningful for me, but it was on a warm spring day at Wellspring, the retreat center sponsored by the Church of the Savior in Washington, DC, that a new dimension was added to the spiritual practice of retreat. There, gathered with about thirty other seekers, I experienced my first *silent retreat* for which the stated purpose was to *meet God* in the silence, and in those twenty-four hours, I found a resource and a practice for which I had been searching.

"That particular retreat with its emphasis on the nurturing of the *inward journey* convinced me of the value and necessity of such retreats if I was going to be equipped for the demands and challenges of the *outward journey*. My religious heritage over-emphasized being busy for God and *doing*, and either neglected or minimized the practices of nourishing the kingdom within. That retreat at Wellspring introduced me to the contemplative life, and set me on a path that has been vital to my spiritual life and, in fact, to my general well-being.

"That silent retreat introduced me to the practices that would make it more likely for me to be aware of God's presence. The orientation of the retreat showed me that a person could grow into expecting that meeting God in the everyday ordinary could become a natural part of one's everyday life." (*Traveling Well*, pp. 38-39)

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by inviting members to read aloud together the prayer in the study guide.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 24:13-35 from a modern translation.

## Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

## Reflection

Like both the pilgrimage and the short-term mission trip (in the second and fifth studies in this series), the spiritual retreat can be a specifically Christian form of travel experience. If we follow Jeanie Miley in understanding

the spiritual retreat rather broadly, we can use elements of retreat to enrich our family vacations and hiking (as in the first and third studies). Encourage members to share their experiences on various forms of spiritual retreat. Perhaps your group will use this opportunity to plan or join a retreat.

### **Study Questions**

1. Jeanie Miley emphasizes that “we experience retreat in many ways.” The three families of retreat discussed here—silent, specific group-oriented, and family-oriented retreats—share the common goal of “equip[ping] the serious seeker of God to find God in daily life.” Each type requires careful planning and involves withdrawing from one’s usual daily activities for a period. These are special times of intentionally seeking God’s presence, yet they do not “program” or manipulate an appearance by God; they clear time from disciples’ busy lives and provide an opportunity for them to “wait for the Lord.”
2. Encourage members to share their experiences of planned spiritual retreat—perhaps in a youth camp, a church weekend outing, a visit to a retreat center, or so on. How would they categorize the retreat, and what has been its lasting value? Would they repeat that experience, or improve on it?

The three types of retreat have different emphases—quieting one’s heart before God (in what Miley calls the “inward journey”), encouraging one another in spiritual growth, and developing cross-generational family patterns of seeking a deeper relationship with God. Depending on one’s stage in life and discipleship needs, one of these types of retreat might seem more attractive and valuable than the others.

3. In Henry Ossawa Tanner’s *Jesus and His Disciples on Their Way to Bethany*, Jesus walks ahead of the disciples. To emphasize Jesus’ leadership, Tanner inserts the figure of a goat herder bowing in reverence to the Lord. Of course, the herder/shepherd’s task is a biblical emblem of Jesus’ guiding and caring for the disciples. Bethany, a small town just one and a half miles southeast of Jerusalem, was the home of Jesus’ close friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Tanner, following his pastor father’s interpretation, presents the nightly walk to Bethany as entering a quiet retreat from all the bustle, ministry, and confrontation in Jerusalem.
4. Both Lelio Orsi’s painting and David Music’s hymn interpret the disciples’ spiritual condition and quest. Orsi depicts the disciples “in pilgrim’s clothing,” Heidi Hornik notes. The disciple on the left is wringing his hands in anxiety; both appear to be despondent, and they prominently carry swords because they are afraid. By contrast, Christ steps confidently forward, his hand outstretched as if in animated conversation.

David Music describes the disciples as “weighed down with grief and sorrow’s load.” The spiritual refreshment they sought (“in hopes their dreams would be restored”) is available to us as we journey on pilgrimage (stanza 3) and ministry (stanza 4): “our hopes refreshed, our dreams restored, / for as we go, we take the Lord.”

### **Departing Hymn**

“While on the Long Emmaus Road” is on pp. 55-57 of *Traveling Well*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

# Planning Mission Trips that Matter

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 2 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To examine the spiritual value of short-term mission (STM) experiences for participants and host communities.
2. To identify some of the common pitfalls of STM experiences.
3. To consider how to carefully plan and execute STM experiences in order to avoid or mitigate the common pitfalls.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Traveling Well (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting.

## Begin with a Story

"When my father moved to Nigeria to serve as a missionary in 1968, he went through painstaking preparation. The logistics of transatlantic travel were complicated. There were significant financial expenses. He soaked in as much information as he could during a two-month training experience. Perhaps nothing adequately prepared him, though, for saying goodbye to the world he knew and realizing that contact with those he loved would be very limited in the coming years.

"Since then, the world has changed tremendously. When I was a twenty-year-old college student, it took me just a few months to raise funds to serve in Kenya with a team of students on a two-week short-term mission (STM) trip. You have probably seen teams like mine in an airport—sporting their gear in backpacks, wearing identical T-shirts, wading in clumps through security lines, and searching for their gate. Sponsoring short-term missions is the biggest trend to hit evangelical churches since Vacation Bible School, and it is growing exponentially. In 1989, an estimated 120,000 North Americans participated in STM trips. By 2003, that number grew to one million. In 2010, an estimated two to three million North Americans traveled internationally on STM trips. Never in history have so many people participated directly in global missions. In fact, Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow estimates that today's church member in the United States has a 20-25% likelihood of going on a STM trip. What started as a grassroots endeavor among church youth groups is becoming commonplace in North American churches." (*Traveling Well*, p. 47)

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by inviting members to read responsively the prayer in the study guide.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 10:1-16 from a modern translation.

## Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

## Reflection

The short-term mission (STM) trip is the newest and most popular of the specifically Christian forms of travel. This study reviews the leading criticisms of STM trips and offers a model for avoiding or mitigating the most common pitfalls of these trips. The spiritual value of STM travel, according to Curt Kruschwitz, turns out to have much in common with pilgrimage and spiritual retreat, two much older Christian forms of traveling well.

The books reviewed in Tyler Garrard's *Resources for Short-Term Missions* can help members as they plan, lead, or participate in their next STM experience.

## Study Questions

1. STM trips can be fun and safe ways of traveling with others – church friends, family members, or professionals with common skills and interests – to interesting (and sometimes exotic) destinations and interacting with the people who live there. Participants may form lasting spiritual friendships with one another, career missionaries, or members of the host communities. The cost of long-distance travel has decreased in recent years, and sending congregations, host communities, and others may subsidize these service-oriented trips.

But STM trips are more than fun and relatively inexpensive ways to travel. Christians are increasingly aware of spiritual, financial, and social needs in the world (through reports in the media or from friends who travel, or their first-hand experience), and STM trips appeal to their desire to make a difference, or (in Laurie Occhipinti's words) "to do something meaningful in a way that doesn't seem possible in our day-to-day lives."

2. Curt Kruschwitz highlights several values of STM experiences. First, participants may have "a heightened alertness to God's activity in their lives" as they gather "to learn, pray, worship, and serve in a community for several days in a row." The trip may spark a clarifying call to some form of ministry when they return home. Second, participants may form lasting spiritual friendships with one another, a career missionary, or members of the host community. Third, they may learn more about the brokenness of the world, or (in anthropologists Brian Howell's words) "how the problems there are part of our problems here...how we are bound up together, in our economics, in our politics, and most importantly, in Christ." Fourth, they may develop habits of theological reflection on their daily experience and Bible study that carryover to their lives when they return. These facets of spiritual growth may accrue to the members of host communities as well.
3. Six pitfalls are listed in the study guide. Form small groups to discuss them individually or to focus on a few pitfalls that seem most salient in your ministry situation. "It is not always possible to do a trip 'right,'" Tyler Garrard warns in *Resources for Short-Term Missions*. "Part of the reason for this is cultural and structural, part is the difficulty of breaking habits, and part is because trips involve working with and for people with complex motives and personal limitations." Consider how each pitfall might have these various causes.
4. Invite members to reflect on their STM experiences. Were they of lasting spiritual value? Did they suffer some of these problems? Evaluate a recent STM trip that members shared in the congregation. How would you increase its long-term spiritual value for participants and host community? How would you avoid or mitigate the pitfalls you experienced? Kruschwitz describes how his congregation redesigned their Mission Formation Experiences. Consider how aspects of that redesign could be adapted to improve your STM experience.
5. "One of the hazards for me personally in mission-based travel," Waller admits, is focusing on a task and blocking everything else out. He made some friends along the way. But the greatest value was learning to respond to "a cultural practice or way of life which conflicts with one's core principles." His approach is "simple, even if difficult at times: treat people respectfully, lovingly ask questions, present one's own viewpoint, and move forward on common ground. When this amounts to a single conversation on a plane or a bus or over coffee, it feels manageable, but it is harder to do this every day in interaction with neighbors, coworkers, and friends. It is a challenge to hold tight for a conflict-averse, people-pleaser like myself. Yet it is a struggle that the church of pilgrim-travelers cannot avoid."

## Departing Hymn

"While on the Long Emmaus Road" is on pp. 55-57 of *Traveling Well*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.