7 Day Heart Check

These next seven days are designed for you to examine why you want to GO on mission and define why God is calling you on mission? What has led you here? 1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, preparing your minds for action,[a] and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”
Day 1 Mission or Pilgrimage?

“Imagine a team from France calls your church and says they want to visit. They want to put on a VBS (which you have done for years), but the material is in French. They have heard about how the U.S. church has struggled and want to help you fix it. They want to send twenty people, half of them youth. Only two of them speak English. They need a place to stay for free, with cheap food and warm showers if possible. During the trip, half of the group’s energy will be spent on resolving tension between team members. Two people will get sick. They’d like you to arrange some sightseeing for them on their free day. Do you want them to come?”1

This isn’t said to discourage you but to let you know that great teams don’t happen by accident. Great teams happen because they are spiritually prepped, educated on effective missions’ strategies, and culturally competent.

Great teams go on mission to help move forward what God is doing. There are also teams that come and hinder and damage what God is doing. This will be a tough, no-nonsense, 30-day devotional because we desire for teams to be thoroughly prepared to serve on mission, and we want to limit the possibility that a team could hurt God’s efforts to rescue and transform those who need Him. Take this devotional seriously and allow the Holy Spirit to change you over the next 30 days.

As you begin, consider the following question: Are you embarking on a mission or a pilgrimage? A pilgrimage may be defined as a journey that you undertake as a quest for some religious purpose, whereas a mission is the work or calling of a team to fulfill some purpose on behalf of or with another group of people. The key feature of a pilgrimage is that it is focused on your own spiritual growth while a mission is focused on the fulfillment of a calling on behalf of others. There is a time and place for pilgrimage – this is not to say that it is wrong to seek your own spiritual growth – however, this trip must be about mission lest you hinder the work that God is doing in the lives you will encounter. Are you embarking on a journey that will fulfill your own spiritual needs or on a mission – to serve others and to glorify God?

We are preparing you for a mission, and if you are signed up for a pilgrimage, this trip is not for you.
Day 2 Wrong Motive - Adventure

There is no doubt that mission trips, both short and long, offer the allure of a grand adventure. The prospect of removing yourself from your typical environment and drinking in the sights, smells, foods, and customs of another culture are what draw millions of people into cross-cultural tourism every year.

Do a simple Google search on missions and see how many websites advertise adventure as being a part of their trips. There is a reason they do this. While adventure will play some role in missions, it can dangerously be the primary reason that many find themselves wanting to venture to the mission field in the first place. It is easy to find yourself thirsting for a retreat, to get out and away. And while a vacation might not be justifiable to your pocketbook, getting your hands a little dirty on a mission trip is. Does this sound familiar?

Adventure is by no means a bad thing. Neither is a desire to fully delve into the culture in which you are ministering. However, your perspective and expectations going into any endeavor will greatly influence how you actually experience it. If your primary focus for the trip derives from your excitement for adventure, then you risk the possibility of being sorely disappointed or prevented from fully participating spiritually as well as effectively aiding in the long term ministry already underway. Long days working at the same ministry site will likely mean less of an opportunity to explore as much as you want to. And looking forward to your free day and down time every day could prevent you from being spiritually focused and present in the primary mission.

The right motive when participating in short term missions is a concept you will explore in greater depth in the days to come. But before you get that far, it is important to first address what the current motives of your heart really are. Let us make one thing clear: Your participation in the ministry being done on the field is not about adventure. Your primary focus and heart must be that of the spiritual nature – to share the love of Christ as a team and as individuals and, in doing so, to aid in the work already being done in country. You must have no illusions that this will always be a fun and easy task. It is important and helpful to look to the ministry of Christ and his disciples as an example.

Check out Matthew 10. When Jesus sent out the Twelve, we have no record of Him telling them of all the amazing and fun adventures they would encounter in each city. Instead, He warned them of dangers, difficulties and hard work that would be required of them. Another good example to consider is the difference between motives of many Western missionaries and that of others who find themselves in more dangerous situations that do not offer the luxury of a safe adventure.

“The fun-filled, adventurous mind-set is quite a contrast from the thousands of young, aspiring missionaries in China who are ready and expecting to die for the gospel during their mission sojourns. In their words, ‘The Muslim and Buddhist nations can torture us, imprison us, and starve us, but they can do no more than we have already experienced in China. . . . We are not only ready to die for the gospel, we are expecting it.’ ”

3
In advancing the kingdom of God, you will undoubtedly come up against the forces of evil that seek to prevent lost lives from being reached with the love and healing of Jesus Christ. Although you might not be physically threatened, it is important to go onto the mission field with the same spiritual focus, tenacity and passion these Chinese missionaries exhibit.

Sometimes, a wrong motive is unconscious. It is therefore important to take some time to discover what is in your own heart and mind. Here are some questions to ask yourself. Answer honestly before you continue on. Do not answer according what you know to be the “right answer”. It is imperative that you have an accurate understanding of your own current heart condition so that wrong motives can be adequately addressed.

- Am I more excited about sharing Jesus and lives being saved than the food I will eat, the sights I will see, and the souvenirs I can buy?
- What stories am I already anticipating telling my friends and family when I return home? Are they mostly stories of ministry or tourism?
- Am I willing to joyfully serve on mission even if it requires exhaustion, long days, submission to authority, and not being able to see and partake in all the aspects of culture that I want to?

“The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few!”4 Let not your desire for adventure keep you from being the laborer that brings in a bountiful harvest.

Day 3 Wrong Motive – Poverty Tourism

We have all seen them. They break our hearts, put smiles on our faces, make us think it was all worth it. They are the stereotypical trip photos made into Facebook profile pictures and decorating church PowerPoint presentations. And they usually take the form of a missionary posing with an impoverished local child, swallowed in clothes two sizes too big, their dirty faces standing in contrast to their beautiful eyes and brilliant smiles.

But here we must again return to the concept of motivation and explore a notion that people might be less inclined to admit to... Poverty tourism.

Who would want to do that? Who wants to be a tourist in unclean and poverty-stricken streets? Isn’t tourism what you do in lavish and luxurious places like Italy and France? This is certainly not what you do on a mission trip! You’re right – it’s not. Or rather, it shouldn’t be. But let’s think about what you do on a tourist vacation. You take pictures of all the famous sites you visited, maybe snapping some of yourself with local street performers. Essentially, you visit that country to use it for what it has to offer you, telling stories to your friends at home of the excellent hotel service, food, or how awful the transportation systems were.
Being on mission is not like traveling to Italy or France on vacation. It is safe to say that you will not be going on mission to stay in fancy hotels, and the people you will be working and interacting with are NOT sites to see the way the Eiffel Tower is either. They are NOT trophies to be used to exhibit your love and compassion when you return home to tell your friends and family members about your trip.

They are people. They have equal value to those of us who are fortunate enough to experience a higher standard of living. To treat them otherwise would be exploitation. It is hardly expected that you would go on mission with such a malicious purpose. You do, after all, have some amount of passion for those who are being rescued out from under the evil and oppressive hand of sexual exploitation.

But just as using missions as an avenue to achieve adventure is often unconsciously done, so too is holding the attitude of poverty tourism. How would you feel if a foreign missionary came to you and your family’s home, picked up your children, and started snapping pictures of them? Poverty tourism stems, ultimately, from an attitude of pride.

Let’s look at the attitude Jesus had toward those He worked with and ministered to by checking out Mark 6. After Jesus told His disciples to retreat to rest after a long time of ministry, the people would not give them a break and went ahead of them. Jesus “saw a great crowd, and He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” Indeed Jesus had compassion. But it was one that was marked with a love that compelled Him to work in the trenches, to rebuke the arrogance of the Pharisees, to both heal and challenge the destitute and the sinners.

That’s what I am here for, you say. But let us also look at Matthew 18. “At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ And calling to Him a child, He put him in the midst of them and said, ‘Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’”

The key here is the humility to which Jesus calls His disciples. You might be willing to serve day and night, or to carry the grimy bodies of little children, but are you doing so with a heart of humility toward those whom you serve?

Taking pictures is not inherently a bad thing. And it is natural if you experience a level of culture shock at the poverty with which people live in comparison to your own standard of living. But be careful not to let material pride keep you from walking humbly and instead lead you into poverty tourism – into using the circumstances of others merely to gratify your desire to do something good.
Ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I willing to dig in the trenches, even if I never get to see the fruit of my work?
- Am I willing to leave my camera at home to prevent me from exploiting the circumstances of the local people?
- How would I feel if our trip’s shopping day got canceled?
- How do I truly view the lives of people who are materially less fortunate than me, and how does this compare with the attitude and life of Christ?
- Do I want to go just to see what it is like for other people to live in poverty?
- Is my bleeding heart simply defined by pity, or a genuine, Christ-like love?

Ask the Lord to convict your heart of poverty tourism you may have exhibited in the past or as an attitude you might have now.

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:8 (ESV)

Day 4 What God is going to do in my life

Have you seen the latest consumer reports? According to the Department of Labor’s 2011 Consumer Expenditures Report, the average American household spent nearly $2,500 on entertainment in 2011. “Over 40% of American families spend more than they earn” and “carry, on average, $8,400 in credit card debt.”

We see a culture that is fueled by a desire to satisfy self and live extravagantly. These attitudes and behaviors aren’t just relevant to the secular world, but are very much a part of the Western Christian culture as well. Unfortunately, the same “me-centered” consumerist patterns exhibited in the United States spill over into our spiritual lives and can play a detrimental role in Christian world missions.

This isn’t just about money. This is, once again, about perceptions and expectations established before going onto the mission field. Recall what we addressed the last couple of days: the wrong motives of adventure and poverty tourism. In discovering how these motivations might have played a role in your decision to serve, it might not have been too hard for you to change your thought processes and begin to think about how you can align yourself with the right motivations.

But this “me-centered” phenomenon that says, “My life is going to be changed,” or, “I can’t wait to see what the Lord is going to do in my friends and me during this trip,” might be harder to overcome because it really does feel right to us in the first place. It seems like the good and spiritual thing to desire after all – far better than merely looking forward to what souvenirs you can buy or the awesome pictures you can take with your new camera. But going on a trip so that God can touch your life is still self-centered.
In a sheltered culture, convicted by our own ignorance of the world, “people are convinced short-term missions are one of the most effective ways to expose American Christians to the needs of the world.”

Parents send their teens on trips with the local church youth group in order to open their eyes to the challenges people face in other parts of the world, and we often use the spiritual highs and enlightenments we expect to experience as catalysts for our own little spiritual awakenings.

Consider these scenarios: You have been spiritually dry, lacking revelation and insight, and you know that traveling to another country and encountering the work of Christ’s kingdom is just what you need to bring you to the next level in your relationship with God. Or maybe your spiritual cup is overflowing and you know from experience that serving will keep it that way. Even though these might seem like right motivations, they are not. THIS TRIP IS NOT ABOUT YOU. This trip is about God receiving glory through transformed lives.

Of course we want God to work in our lives, to refine us and reveal Himself to us. And more often than not, serving others in the setting of a mission trip will bring spiritual growth and refreshment and make us more aware of the needs in our world. And again, these are not bad things in themselves. But spiritual self-centeredness, as a motivating factor, can have the same distracting effect as that of seeking adventure or poverty tourism. It can pull us away from the lasting spiritual and physical impact God wants to have on the people and the established ministry being done there. It can essentially become a “spiritual vacation” as focus becomes internal instead of external – as we become something other than the tools in the hands of God that we were meant to be.

Modern Christians are not the only ones with this “me-centered” mentality.

Read Matthew 20:20-28. The mother of disciples James and John asked if her sons could sit at the right and left hand of Christ in His kingdom. She too was concerned with what her sons could get by being part of Jesus’ ministry. To this, Jesus responded, “Yet it shall be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as ransom for many.”

Here, Jesus clearly identified the mother’s motive as out of line and provided an alternative that stood in blatant contrast.

Take a moment to search your heart and see if you have fallen to this “me-centered” mindset, and remember that Christ says that “whoever desires to save his life will lose it.” Ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I willing to serve in even if it means I will get nothing out of it – no sense of satisfaction for doing a good thing or spiritual revelation?
- What am I truly looking forward to the most about this trip?
- Is my heart that of a servant who desires to dutifully serve his master, or gain something for myself?
Day 5 Servants Heart

“After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. . . . So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.’”12

Thus far, we have addressed some possible wrong motives that may have led you to want to participate on mission, or in any short-term mission trip for that matter. In reflecting on these past couple days, hopefully you have already begun to discover what the right motives ought to be.

The above Scripture gives us a clear picture of the mission of Christ on this earth and to what He has called His disciples in His absence and preparation for His return. You are probably familiar with this passage; it often serves as the inspiration for modern feet-washing ceremonies done symbolically in churches today. Understanding the historical and cultural contexts of this strange event and command of Jesus can further illuminate the kind of lives we are meant to lead every day and on the mission field.

It is, first and foremost, a call to service and humility. It’s safe to admit that this is a hard concept for the Western Church, where service often looks like participating in the local church’s homeless ministry a couple times a year. And even these good deeds can be driven by the wrong motives that we have talked about in the past few days. But the actions Jesus models for us in washing His disciples’ feet are far more radical than we might initially estimate.

Foot washing was the business of servants. It was the dirty work of the lowly as they cleaned the dusty, and no doubt gnarly, feet of others who had trekked miles in shoes that weren’t quite as well-made or protective as shoes are today. Think of a fairly nasty job you would deign to do. That is essentially what Jesus was doing. But it wasn’t just about foot washing, it was about humbling Himself before others, about denying Himself and disregarding the majesty and glory due to Him and putting others first. Jesus adopted a lowly posture before others to demonstrate His love for them, and to give us an example of how we are to treat other people.

It is easy to think that we can be both servants and seek out our grand adventure. Love people and get something in return. But what Jesus did in this act was to eliminate all of those pre-conditions and posture Himself in the most lowly of ways. He indeed “came not to be served but to serve.”13

On this trip you are called to serve:

- **God:** The purpose of this trip is to glorify God through your service.
- **Missionaries:** Your team should serve and support the work that the mission staff and leaders are doing, not the other way around.
- **To the people:** You are to be a reflection of Christ’s love to the country – not merely when at a ministry site, but when you are at your hotel, restaurant or market.
- **Your team members:** you are to do to them as you would want them to do to you.
Challenge yourself to model your life after Christ’s, to consider what He would do and how He would serve. Consider the uneasy task that was set before Him – to bear the sins of the world amassed over thousands of years – and how He faced it with love and courage and self-sacrifice, and considered everything else a loss that He might accomplish this goal. A physical cross might not be yours to bear, but the same motivations that prompted Jesus to give His life are what ought to drive you in this ministry. Whether it is to serve the people, the permanent in-country staff, or your teammates, let not your pride, your personal motivations, your weariness, or even your fear keep you from selflessly extending yourself to others.

As Paul writes in Ephesians 4:1-3 (ESV): “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Consider the following questions:

- In honest self-evaluation, how much have you typically been willing to serve in the past, and how does that compare with the example of Christ?
- What are some obstacles (spiritual, emotional, physical and mental) that might keep you from denying self and giving to others?

This is just a brief look at what the model of service Jesus gives to us. Take some time to look elsewhere throughout Scripture to see how else Jesus demonstrated this. In understanding His nature and character, it becomes easier for us to understand how we are to be conformed into His image.

Day 6 Glorify God

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.” 14

In six days God created the entirety of the world. The birds of the sky, the depths of the ocean, the heights of the mountains, the plants and animals that sustain human life, and later humans themselves were imagined into being and created by an all-powerful God. He demonstrated His justice by sending out a flood to rid the world of unrighteousness and demonstrated His faithfulness and love in saving Noah and his family. He led millions of slaves out from under the hand of oppression in Egypt and parted the waters of the Red Sea. He established a nation, punished a nation, and rescued a nation over and over again. He showed Himself the master planner and ultimate lover in sending His son to save those whom He loves and to restore all things unto Himself. All of nature proclaims who He is and His invisible attributes are made known to all in what surrounds us. The efforts of kings and philosophers to blot out His name have not prevailed. And He has established the largest, longest-lasting kingdom the world has ever seen.
This is a God who surely deserves all the glory.

And your motivation as a short-term missionary is to, above all, give Him the praise and glory due His name. Every other right motivation finds its place under the supremacy of this concept or will come from your commitment to fulfill the same.

Jesus, who is one with God the Father, understood this well. The Gospel of John particularly emphasizes Jesus’ deity and oneness with the Father, and it is this that drives His dependency on the Father in all things and serves as the motivation to do the Father’s will in all circumstances. John 5:30 says, “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (emphasis added). Jesus’ ministry was marked by a deep connection with the will of the Father. All of His teachings and healings on earth were derived from this dependency and desire to fulfill the heart of the Father.

If this was the driving force behind Jesus’ ministry, should it not also be that which motivates you in the ministry you are about to begin? To bring glory to God in the work being done should be the primary focus. It isn’t about you, or even about the people you serve or are working with. It is about giving the praise to the one who enables you to do this ministry, who is the very reason for this ministry, who brings redemption and salvation and healing to the world.

Paul made this clear in his letter to the Colossians. “Whatever you do, in word or deed,” he says, “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” This point is expanded upon later in Colossians when Paul describes what the behavior of slaves ought to be before their masters. “Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Jesus Christ.”

This is not necessarily a support of slavery, but rather it is an exhortation to people to live lives that are glorifying to the Lord in whatever circumstance they happen to be in. As slaves, you can imagine this might be quite difficult. But Paul encourages them that their work is not done unto man, but should rather be done to the Lord, to glorify Him and point to Him in all ways. As Ephesians 6 points out, we are slaves to Christ.

Glorifying God on the mission field need not only be demonstrated in the specific works of the ministry. It is to be done in all circumstances, whether you are providing medical care, shoveling dirt, serving a meal, or in the way you respond to being sick and having to stay back in your hotel.

Doing work first and foremost to the Lord is what keeps us on track. It prevents things like pride, self-service, and other wrong motivations from creeping in as we focus on the one who deserves and has called us to our labor in the first place. We find our purpose in the Lord, and thus it makes sense to glorify Him in everything we do. In our labors and efforts there is a certain comfort and clarity of direction too, when we find our true purpose in serving God. Pressures of man, fear, insecurity and disappointment all come under the submission of someone greater.
However, when we do this, we place ourselves on the throne that belongs to God: we have a god-complex. We set out on missions thinking that we are saving the world through both our knowledge and our stuff.

The Western Church especially views material things – whether wealth or superior resources – as a sign of success, and thus as the answer to most problems. However, this mindset is especially potent when working with impoverished peoples and can actually be a hindrance to the very communities you are trying to help, as well as to your own spiritual health. In fact, “one of the biggest problems in many poverty-alleviation efforts is that their design and implementation exacerbates the poverty of being of the economically rich – their god-complexes – and the poverty of being of the economically poor – their feelings of inferiority and shame. The way that we act toward the economically poor often communicates – albeit unintentionally – that we are superior and they are inferior.”

The reality is, despite the abundance of resources and knowledge, wealth and counseling, the Western Church is still in need of Christ’s saving power as much as churches in less-developed nations worldwide. We don’t have it all figured out. In fact, our tendency is to put stock solely in ourselves and our capabilities instead of relying on the God who has provided them, and who is our creator and sustainer. No tool of ours can “fix” the world. Instead, our ministry to the global community should be an invitation to show who has, and who is continuing to fix us. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert put it well in their book, When Helping Hurts:

Our relationship to the materially poor should be one in which we recognize that both of us are broken and that both of us need the blessing of reconciliation. Our perspective should be less about how we are going to fix the materially [and spiritually] poor and more about how we can walk together, asking God to fix both of us... We must do our best to preach the gospel... but part of our striving is also to fall on our knees every day and pray.

One of the greatest tragedies of missionaries with god-complexes is that they believe they are bringing Christ to a mission site. Christ is already working in the place you are going; God has long been working to establish His Church that currently exists in there. Local disciples have already been made and the work of the kingdom is underway. With that in mind, Western missionaries should be aware of the fact that although they may be equipped with valuable resources, they are not God’s superior blessing to believers. Yes, you can provide care and knowledge that might not otherwise be available, but your great privilege is that you get to partner with what Christ has already started.

Wealth and resources are vital to the advancement of the kingdom, but don’t allow those resources to give you a god-complex. Remember that God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, the weak things to shame the mighty, and the poor to be rich in faith. And the body of Christ is not made up of separate entities with some better than others. Rather, “[t]here is one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

In doing ministry, it would be helpful to be aware of a possible god-complex, and to consider and live out the words of Paul in his letter to the church in Philippi: “In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”
It is from this place of praise and worship unto the Lord that other motivations find root. Service and ministry are the ways in which we demonstrate our ultimate desire to glorify the Lord. As John 15:18 says, “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” Indeed, we demonstrate who we are and whom we serve by our love and the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control flow from our devotion to the Lord.

Our desire for adventure, to feel as if we are doing something good for others, and to love other people must come from our willingness and core desire to serve and glorify God, from whom all things flow and find their meaning.

Identifying if this truly is your primary motivation can be difficult. Sometimes other motivations cloud our clarity of understanding. Ask yourself the following questions to help you understand what lies within your own heart:

- How would I respond if I didn’t get to do the kind of ministry I was expecting or hoping to do?
- What if no one sees the work that I will do or I myself don’t see the fruit of my labor?
- Do I often find myself striving in my own efforts, or do I more often depend on the Father?

Day 7 Negative Perspective – God Complex

The Western Church is extremely fortunate in the abundant amount of opportunities it has to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ. In many cities, churches of various denominations dot every corner, multiple ministries exist on the same street, and pastoral and personal counseling are available for those who seek it. The average church member could visit their local Barnes & Noble bookstore and find more choices on study Bibles and books giving life advice than anyone could consume in years. Readily available knowledge and wisdom from ancient as well as modern thinkers has made this society a rather informed one in comparison to a global community in which “[e]ighty-five percent of churches . . . are led by men and women who have no formal training in theology or ministry.” Combine this knowledge with the tremendous amount of wealth and resources at the West’s fingertips, and it seems we have the answer to life that everyone else is obviously waiting for.

It sounds a little presumptuous, doesn’t it?

Perhaps the thing that most excites you about traveling to do ministry in another country – a poor country – is your ability to help other people. You can’t wait to lend your skills, your service, to share your deep store of knowledge, to bring the glorious message of Christ to a dark world. That is wonderful. But just as many of the other “good” motives that we discussed earlier have lurking evils, so does this perception of ministry. As missionaries from places or cultures like the West, it is easy to think that we have it all together. We have the knowledge, the wealth, the tools, and the ability to bring the good life to populations that just can’t quite get their act together. This can be exhibited in both a material and spiritual sense.
However, when we do this, we place ourselves on the throne that belongs to God: we have a god-complex. We set out on missions thinking that we are saving the world through both our knowledge and our stuff.

The Western Church especially views material things – whether wealth or superior resources – as a sign of success, and thus as the answer to most problems. However, this mindset is especially potent when working with impoverished peoples and can actually be a hindrance to the very communities you are trying to help, as well as to your own spiritual health. In fact, “[o]ne of the biggest problems in many poverty-alleviation efforts is that their design and implementation exacerbates the poverty of being of the economically rich – their god-complexes – and the poverty of being of the economically poor – their feelings of inferiority and shame. The way that we act toward the economically poor often communicates – albeit unintentionally – that we are superior and they are inferior.”20

The reality is, despite the abundance of resources and knowledge, wealth and counseling, the Western Church is still in need of Christ’s saving power as much as churches in less-developed nations worldwide. We don’t have it all figured out. In fact, our tendency is to put stock solely in ourselves and our capabilities instead of relying on the God who has provided them, and who is our creator and sustainer. 21 No tool of ours can “fix” the world. Instead, our ministry to the global community should be an invitation to show who has, and who is continuing to fix us. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert put it well in their book, When Helping Hurts:

Our relationship to the materially poor should be one in which we recognize that both of us are broken and that both of us need the blessing of reconciliation. Our perspective should be less about how we are going to fix the materially [and spiritually] poor and more about how we can walk together, asking God to fix both of us. . . . We must do our best to preach the gospel . . . but part of our striving is also to fall on our knees every day and pray.

One of the greatest tragedies of missionaries with god-complexes is that they believe they are bringing Christ to a mission site. Christ is already working in the place you are going; God has long been working to establish His Church that currently exists in there. Local disciples have already been made and the work of the kingdom is underway. With that in mind, Western missionaries should be aware of the fact that although they may be equipped with valuable resources, they are not God’s superior blessing to believers. Yes, you can provide care and knowledge that might not otherwise be available, but your great privilege is that you get to partner with what Christ has already started.

Wealth and resources are vital to the advancement of the kingdom, but don’t allow those resources to give you a god-complex. Remember that God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, the weak things to shame the mighty, 22 and the poor to be rich in faith.23 And the body of Christ is not made up of separate entities with some better than others. Rather, “[t]here is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”24
In doing ministry, it would be helpful to be aware of a possible god-complex, and to consider and live out the words of Paul in his letter to the church in Philippi: “In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”

Here are some questions you can ask in order to prepare yourself to come alongside the ministry being done:

- **What areas can I identify that still need refinement in my life?**
- **Do I view those who are economically less fortunate to be spiritually inferior?**

In what ways might I offer service to local believers and staff members in a way that is humble and helpful to existing ministry?