



Know Before You Go



Rethinking our methods and goals
in short-term missions



Gary Miller

Know
Before
You *Go*

© 2016 by TGS International, a wholly owned subsidiary of
Christian Aid Ministries, Berlin, Ohio.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used, reproduced, or stored in any retrieval system, in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, without written permission from the publisher except for brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

ISBN: 978-1-941213-92-6

Cover design and layout: Kristi Yoder

Illustrations: Jerron Hess

Front cover photos: shutterstock.com

Printed in the USA



TGS001192

Published by:
TGS International
P.O. Box 355
Berlin, Ohio 44610 USA
Phone: 330-893-4828
Fax: 330-893-2305
www.tgsinternational.com

Know
Before
You *Go*

Rethinking our methods and goals
in short-term missions

Gary Miller

Contents

1.	Will This Be the Year?	7
2.	Good Intentions	17
3.	One Project—Two Views	25
4.	What Happened?	35
5.	Not All Poverty Is the Same	43
6.	Identifying Root Causes	51
7.	Cultural Conflict	59
8.	Where Should We Start?	67
9.	Avoiding the Pitfalls	75
10.	Why Should I Go?	85
11.	Motives and Goals	93
12.	The Greatest Danger	101
	Endnotes	107
	About the Author	109
	Additional Resources by Gary Miller	111
	Bibliography	115

Will This Be the Year?

The Johnson children were excited. For years, they had dreamed of taking a vacation in the Southwest. They had collected brochures, planned routes, and calculated costs. They had even talked of renting a motor home. The highlight of the trip, in the children's minds, was a trip to the bottom of the Grand Canyon on mules. But each year when Father gave the final report after the harvest, there wasn't enough money to take the trip. This year, however, the crop on their large peach farm close to Lake Michigan looked promising. This might be the year they had been waiting for!

Just across the road from the Johnsons lived the Browns. The families had so many similarities that they jokingly referred to each other as "sister families." They had the same number of children, attended the same church, and farmed almost the same acreage of peaches. While the Johnsons dreamed of the Grand Canyon, the Browns had talked for years of going to

see their grandparents in California. As the children interacted, they talked about their travel dreams. What would it be like to play in the Pacific Ocean? And imagine riding a mule on a narrow ledge along the side of a canyon!



The peach crop continued to mature, and one night as the Johnson family talked around the supper table, Father shared some exciting news. He had just talked to his broker, and due to increased demand and late frost in other peach-growing areas, the peaches would likely sell at an unprecedented price. The children's enthusiasm knew no bounds! This could be the year for their vacations!

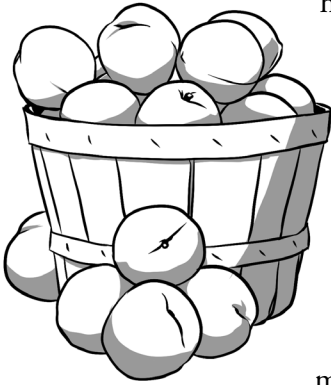
Harvest time approached, and each day the Johnson and Brown children watched those peaches closely. Each night, on both sides of the road, children got down beside their beds and asked the Lord to protect their peach crop. The smaller children were even more specific. "Lord, help us rent one of those big fancy motor homes!"

Harvest week arrived, and suddenly the weather changed. Mr. Johnson entered the house one afternoon and soberly informed the family that a thunderstorm was heading their way, and the chance of damaging hail was high. The children's spirits sank, and Father gathered them around the table to pray. Never in the history of that home had there been such united fervent prayer. To the children, the rumbling thunder sounded like the death knell to their plans. Lightning flashed above them, and one bolt struck not far from the house. Then suddenly, all was quiet.

They ran outside to assess the damage, prepared for the worst. Father jumped into his pickup and drove around their orchard. In a few minutes he returned with a big smile. Miraculously, the hail had missed their crop! The family whooped for joy and hugged each other. Their dream was still alive!

Later that evening Mr. Brown pulled in their driveway to talk with Mr. Johnson. The Browns' farm hadn't fared so well. Mr. Brown wasn't sure about the extent of the damages, but they were significant. That evening the Johnsons gathered for prayer and thanked the Lord for His protection from the hail. They felt sure that God's hand had protected them, especially since hail hit just across the road.

One week later harvest was in full swing, and with each load hauled to the cannery, the Johnsons' hopes soared. Never had they had such a



harvest! And due to the widespread hail damage, the price for peaches soared higher than ever before. They could tell by the smile on Father's face that things were looking good.

Across the road it was much different. The Browns' orchard had taken a direct hit from the storm, and the cannery had informed Mr. Brown that his peaches were not worth harvesting. Mr. Brown still had a large unpaid medical bill from his wife's surgery, and he had confided to Mr. Johnson that they might even lose their farm.

But in the Johnsons' excitement, it was easy to forget about the Browns. As they gathered that evening to hear the final financial report on the harvested peach crop, anticipation was high. Would this be the year they could go to the Grand Canyon? After all these years of waiting, would they finally be able to rent that motor home?

Father came in with the cannery report and shared the good news. Their income was over twice what it had ever been before. Both the price and the peach production had never been so high.

“I promised we would take that trip as soon as we could afford it, and this year we can!” he concluded with a smile.

Shouts of joy erupted from the younger children. “We’re going on a trip!” they whooped as they ran around the table. “We are finally going on our trip! What kind of motor home will it be?”

But the older children were silent. Finally the oldest son protested, “Father, what about the Browns? How can we spend all that money on a trip when they might lose their farm?”

“It doesn’t seem right,” said another. “They worked as hard as we did, and then we get a huge crop and a great price, and they get nothing. And it isn’t their fault!”

“I wouldn’t even enjoy a trip, knowing that the Browns might lose their farm,” said another. “We have always been such good friends.”

Twice as Much as We Need

The family sat in silence. Suddenly something Father

had said began to echo in their ears. *Twice as much as ever before. Twice as much as we need!*

Why had God allowed this to happen? Was it possible that God had given their family twice as much so they could share with the Browns?

After a little more discussion, the decision was unanimous. They would share with the Browns. From the beginning Mr. Johnson had hoped his children would see it this way, but he had wanted them to wrestle with the issue.

The Johnson children never forgot the evening they gave the news to the Brown family. The look of astonishment and relief on the face of Mr. Brown. The tears that trickled down Mrs. Brown's face onto her dress. The looks of amazement on the faces of the Brown children as they comprehended the sacrifice this meant for their friends across the road. The Johnson children felt unexplainable joy as they walked back home. Maybe next year they would go to the Grand Canyon.

So Much in Common

Two families. Families with many similarities, yet the Johnsons' harvest paid off while the Browns' did not. It wasn't because the Johnson family worked harder, planned better, or had better soil. In fact, there was

nothing the Brown family could have done to change the story. For some reason the Johnsons' efforts were rewarded and the Browns' were not. And the Johnson family decided God had given them more so they could share.¹

We Are the Johnsons

Those of us who live in affluent countries like the United States are the Johnsons. We have received more than we need. Our labors have been productive. Most of us don't work any harder than those in developing countries, and we can't claim to be smarter, yet our efforts consistently produce more than we need.

We are like the Johnsons in another way as well. We can all think of more things we would like to do, more things we would like to have, and ways in which our lives could be made even more enjoyable.

But there is a difference between our situation and that of the Johnsons. Those in desperate need may not live just across the road. As we weigh what to do with our surplus, we don't have the Browns' situation before our eyes. Our use of what the Lord continually dumps in our laps would be different if we were surrounded by people who daily struggle just to get enough to eat.

“Our use of what the Lord continually dumps in our laps would be different if we were surrounded by people who daily struggle just to get enough to eat.”

Many youth see this. They are increasingly cognizant of global disparity. They have a sense that God isn't pleased with our self-centered culture, and they have a vision for sharing with those in need. Like

the older son in the Johnson family, they are asking, “How can we keep spending more on ourselves while so many are in need?”

A growing number of vibrant young believers have an obvious desire to turn their backs on a godless and materialistic culture. Instead of pursuing self-centered goals, many are prayerfully considering and earnestly discussing what God would have them do in their generation. They're wondering how they can be a blessing to those who have so little. As a result, many have turned to short-term missions at home and in developing countries.

The goal of this book is to take a closer look at these endeavors. Short-term mission trips can be a blessing, and the intent of this book is not to discourage. But if

they are to actually help people in need, and especially those living in developing countries, we will need to examine some of our methods.

