

Treasures of the Heart

Leader's Page - Lesson Summary

Level: Adult Study

Theme: Treasures of the Heart

Objectives:

- **Examine** the effects of an Orthodox Mission Team experience on individuals and communities (in the US and abroad).
- **Learn** firsthand the impact of a team on the host country from His Grace Jeronymos, Bishop of Bukoba, Tanzania.
- **Study** the missiological theme of *Matthew 6:19-21* using a case study from Bukoba.
- **Apply** what you have learned about the missiological theme of *Matthew 6:19-21* to the treasures you are laying up for yourself in this life.
- **Contribute** to the spreading of Mission awareness by helping your community become involved and in touch with OCMC, offering e-mail addresses of parish ministry leaders and members to missions@ocmc.org.

Overview:

- Pray the Mission Prayer.
- Work through the handouts.

The Bible study is broken down into three sections. The introduction is "Examine and Learn," the main portion is entitled "Study and Reflect" and the wrap-up section is "Apply." You may ask someone to read a section out loud or you may ask that everyone read a section silently with the leader guiding the discussion at appropriate times.
- Close with a prayer.

Materials:

- OCMC Mission Prayer
- New Testament Bible
- Copies of handouts for participants

Challenge Note

One Orthodox Church in Texas has been holding a monthly pot luck dinner open to the entire community for years. Each family brings both a monetary donation and a dish for the potluck. The event serves as an opportunity for the community to break bread together and to raise funds. The proceeds are earmarked for the next year's Team Member from their community. This helps offset the cost of team participation and keeps missions as a monthly event in their parish. (Two team applications have come from this parish this year).

Define

neophyte = novice or amateur (in this lesson it is understood that a neophyte is a new believer)

A Prayer for Missions

*God of truth and love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
hear our prayer for those who do not know You,
that they may come to a saving knowledge of the truth
and that Your Name may be praised among all peoples of the world.*

*Sustain, inspire and enlighten Your servants
who bring them the Gospel.*

*Bring fresh vigor to wavering faith;
sustain our faith when it is still fragile.*

*Continually renew missionary zeal in ourselves and in the Church;
raise up new missionaries who will follow You
to the ends of the world.*

*Make us witnesses to Your goodness,
full of love, strength and faith
for Your glory
and the salvation of the entire world.*

*Through the prayers of St. Paul, St. Fotini,
Sts. Cyril and Methodios, St. Kosmas, St. Innocent,
St. Nicholas of Japan
and all the Missionary Saints,
have mercy on us and save us.
Amen.*

Examine and Learn

- In 2005, 57 adults served on OCMC Orthodox Mission Teams.
- In 2006, 120 adults served.
- Should there be more? Less? Why?

Almost no research on short-term mission teams has been published. What we have observed is that those who go on teams and those who receive teams benefit in a multitude of ways. Team Members willingly work alongside the people of a host community. This cooperation validates the efforts of the local Church whether the team helps to build a Church, lead catechism, run youth camps, care for orphans, or offer health care ministries. More than physical labor, each Team also offers a visible expression of servanthood and love in action, a confirmation of the Gospel, and a witness to the wholeness of the Church.

People benefit by the team experience spiritually (as witness to the vibrancy of the host community despite poverty and/or other obstacles, and their own sense of gratitude in responding to the Great Commission), relationally (by breaking through cultural barriers and joining with others to build the Body of Christ), and formatively (by challenging their world-view). They are affected by this significant life experience that manifests their service to Christ and to His people.

Here is a sampling of responses from 2006 Orthodox Mission Team members, who were asked to share the greatest lessons they learned from their experience:

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| • The Orthodox Church is alive, vibrant and growing. | • I need to be flexible |
| • I went to give, but ended up receiving more than I gave. | • Love and be an example to those around us; unconditional love |
| • That I can share my faith even though we live very different lives in different parts of the world. | • You can't build Rome in a day. There is much to do; 1 trip isn't enough |
| • How truly privileged we are | • Trust in God |
| • Money doesn't bring happiness | • With God all things are possible |
| • The Holy Spirit is at work | • Patience and the true meaning of love |
| • I need to stretch my comfort zone more | • Not to worry so much |
| | • Joy in the midst of hardships |

When asked if they felt that their lives were touched or changed due to their Team experience, their answers were as follows:

Most definitely	79%	I hope so	11%
Yes, but briefly	3%	Somewhat	8%

This feedback testifies to the impact that the Team experience has on Team Members and supports their greater Church involvement thereafter. In general, team members come back with a greater sense of a worldwide Church, a better appreciation for their faith and a willingness to work to 'raise up' their home parish.

Discuss.

Reflect

Study the following verse

Matthew 6:19-21. *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

First, we are told what not to do, and then we are told why. The admonition is to *not lay up for ourselves treasures on this earth*, the why is that they are temporal things that are lost, stolen, subject to breaking or wearing out. Within the same sentence we are told what to do - build up heavenly treasures because they are eternal. Interestingly, we must work to obtain them here on earth, yet they are treasures that we will enjoy later and do not lose value. We also see that the placement of our heart is determined by the treasures we choose to store up.

In your own words, restate the verse.

As Orthodox, we emphasize that 'heaven' begins now - TODAY. The actions we take to store up heavenly treasures, help us to learn to live in eternal time, which is a state of our heart.

Storing up treasures in heaven includes doing such things that change - transform - the individual. This transformation is made manifest as a more dedicated prayer life and in the development of a faith that gives direction to one's life at critical junctures and for daily decisions. The Team application process is rather involved: applying, fund raising, traveling, working, adapting to a new culture, loving and being loved. By sacrificing time, talent and resources, team members, and those who support them, are storing up treasures in heaven. Serving as a Mission Team Member is an opportunity for us to lay up heavenly treasures and thus serve Christ and His Church through giving of time, talent and resources.

Case Study

If serving on a Team is an enriching experience which lays up treasures in heaven, then it is logical that those who receive the Teams also benefit. This perspective fully reveals the impact that our storing up of heavenly treasures has on others. In excerpts of a letter written by His Grace Jeronimos, Bishop of Bukoba, we have some thought provoking feedback on an aim of Orthodox Mission Teams, that few of the faithful are aware of.

Letter from His Grace Jeronymos, Bishop of Bukoba:

"The mission Diocese of Bukoba is always in need of mission teams in order to help our neophytes experience the new life in Christ. Christ's mission, extended through the centuries by His Church, substantially changes a person. It transfigures the inner person, helps him/her transcend the given and enables him/her to be filled with joy and happiness. Life in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, is a life of belonging to each other with relations based on love and readiness to share. It is here that there is a taste of the kingdom of God which is *"peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"* (Rom 14:17)

Truly, mission teams help the neophytes live in reality what they believe. In the one Church, all nations have space, all languages can glorify the living God, all colours can gather together and in unity worship God. Together they can say: "Our Father Who art in heaven." St. Paul would tell us: *"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit"* (Gal 5:25). Mission teams coming to us means they love us. And out of love they are willing and ready to share with us our common faith. We feel we are true brothers and sisters in Christ. Our Orthodox faith has power, the power to transcend the given and unite the peoples in Christ.

When these teams leave, we are filled with tears. Separation is painful. Soon we realize that these tears cement our spiritual relations. We develop a feeling that we have Orthodox brothers and sisters in USA/Canada who love and pray for us. And we must do the same for them. Our understanding of what the Church of Christ is, changes essentially. Teams come to us because we belong to the same Church: the one Church of Christ for all nations, all over the world. What is accomplished contributes to the growth of our mission Diocese. Things are not the same as before. We wish we could continue having every year a Mission Team. During the Team's stay with us, we have worshipped together, communed from one common cup the Body and Blood of Christ, we have shared our cultural values. Indeed there has been a give and take. Mission Teams coming to us means they love us. And out of love they are willing and ready to share with us our common faith."

Apply

1. Reflect on Bishop Jeronimos' letter.

- How you have impacted lives of 'neophytes' recently?
- Do you see this as a goal of mature Christians? of converts?
- Is this the responsibility of your parish priest? the church's outreach committee? of all Christians?
- Do others see the "peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" in your life? Why? Why not?

2. Comment on this profound statement of His Grace: *"In the one Church, all nations have space, all languages can glorify the living God, all colours can gather together and in unity worship God."*

- Does your parish reflect the openness of this statement?
- What can you do to insure that you are part of the 'one Church... glorifying the living God' in which all nations have space?

3. Consider the world around us and how it affects our hearts.

- How do you see the world around us?
- How can we be filled with the Light of Christ, to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven in this world which is immersed in materialism, poverty, superficiality, pain, egotism, selfishness, suffering and greed?
- What is within your heart?
- Are you content with this answer?
- Do you see a need for change?

4. What do you know about the Mission Center?

The Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) helps Orthodox faithful to respond to need and to help build and support vibrant Eucharistic communities around the world. OCMC proclaims and practices the evangelical imperative of the Orthodox faith based on the Gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who commissioned us to *"go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"* (Matthew 28:19). OCMC recruits, trains and sends Missionaries to preach, teach, baptize and minister to the poor, hungry, sick, suffering and orphaned. Additionally the Mission Center makes it possible for donors to support the development of indigenous leaders and strengthen the infrastructures of churches abroad.

5. Discuss how each of us might prove where our heart is.

Every month, support is needed from individuals **and** churches for the general operation of the Mission Center. Take this need to your parish council and ask them to commit to support the general operations of the Mission Center. Make an individual or family decision to support Missions through the Mission Center. This way you and your parish are *"laying up ... treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."*

Become a Mission conscience parish that understands that the call to Missions is a call to all Orthodox Christians and **keeps missions visible within the parish and within the lives of its parishioners.** *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*