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### **Day 1: A bit of history of Appalachia**

Let’s get this started off RIGHT. Let’s learn how to pronounce the place you’re going to serve.

It’s APPLE-AT-CHA. It isn’t APPLE-AY-SHA. Got it? Good! This is probably the first of many new words you’ll experience while you’re here in Kentucky: Holler, yuuns, dryland fish, yalls, passel, ifn’s, winder, waspers, ovair, yaonto. We’ll define those words when you arrive… if you’re lucky.

While you’re here in Kentucky, you’re going to experience a different culture and some amazing people. In order to understand these people, we hope you’ll take a few minutes to read this brief history. It helps you understand where we’ve been, so you can better understand the people you’ll meet. We don’t want this to be a boring history lesson, but rather, a lesson on the hearts of people you’ll grow to love.

Appalachia is known is a cultural region that stretches from southern New York down to northern Alabama and Georgia. Typically - when people talk about Appalachia, they are referring to Central appalachia -including the area of Eastern Kentucky you’re about to serve. Our mountains have helped us retain a lot of uniqueness. They have kept our people partially isolated from the rest of the country and from the influence of other people's involvement in our lives.

Appalachians are very independent and very content with the places we live. We are very close to nature and have a deeply held belief in God. We are typically friendly, kind and helpful to one another, taking care of the needs of others. Appalachians also have a strong sense of what is right and what ought to be. We have a deep mistrust of anyone who is new, anyone who is a stranger. We resist change.

Appalachia has a very long history of exploitation. The struggle continues as each new chapter is written. The area is extremely rich in natural resources, one of which might be considered its people. However, though fabulous wealth has been generated in Appalachia, the mountaineer's share in it has been held to a minimum. Large corporations have taken much of that wealth away.

This beautiful region of steep wooded hills, narrow valleys and winding streams is a land of contradictions and tragedy. Appalachia has become synonymous with destitution and illiteracy, containing some of the poorest counties in the nation. The counties surrounding our mission are in the top 20 poorest places in the US.

Appalachian culture is a real and functioning culture that is revealed through its arts and crafts, traditional music, traditional foods, its customs, traditions and somewhat common language. Traditional foods such as greens, potatoes and beans with cornbread and biscuits are the norm.

The Appalachian culture we witness today is one that has been preserved mostly by families and churches. The constant attempts by the "outlanders" to change this culture are testimony to the determination and strength that persists in this culture. This culture is based on subsistence agriculture and hunting, not on industrial class-structured ways of existence. Two key characteristics of the culture of Appalachia are the independence displayed and the constant mutual aid provided to others in the region.

Culturally, there are four distinctive people groups in Appalachia. To fully understand Appalachia, it is important to recognize this diversity. One people group consists of descendants of the original pioneers who settled in the region during the westward movement. These people tend to be landowners, politicians and business people. The characteristics of this group are self-reliant, independent, hard-working, stable and having strong ties to family.

A second group is composed of the hard-working coal miner, logger or factory worker. The average worker has little education, few skills, a large family, no wealth and few choices in vocation. For example, while coal mining continues to be the largest financial contributor to the economy of West Virginia, poverty in the coalfields remains a daily and depressing reality.

The third group is the profession group. These are individuals and their families who have moved to Appalachia due to a profession (i.e., bankers, lawyers, teachers, ministers, etc.). Members of this group are usually not readily accepted by the Appalachians.

The fourth group is the returning Appalachians. This group consists of those who grew up in the mountains, moved away for employment and are now returning to Appalachia. Many of them find it difficult to adjust to the lifestyle they left as a teenager.

Appalachians expect others to respect their freedom. Independence and self-sufficiency are very important to the people in the region. The friendly greetings and helping hands offered to strangers by the majority of Appalachians will impress the short-term visitor. One should not be misled by our friendliness. Mountain people as a whole are resistant to change, slow to accept outsiders and are very reluctant to accept authority.

Job growth and businesses often suffer here because of our terrain. You simply can’t build a big factory on the side of a mountain, and it’s hard to drive an hour or more to work every day. Our people typically have a hard time moving away from here to get better jobs, since they are accustomed to the embrace of the hills and are committed to their family and the culture. Although many today want to distance themselves from the culture that is known by outsiders as “hillbilly” - it’s that culture that keeps them close to home.

Today, Appalachian people are more diverse than ever, both rural and urban. Nevertheless, we share a common pride, common values and a common heritage. The people in this region have suffered from industries such as oil, coal mining, timber and others. Having extracted the resources from this region and enjoyed many years of prosperity, many of these industries have left, leaving the landscape scarred yet beautiful, exploited yet underdeveloped.

While religion is important in Appalachia, the reality is that better than 65-80 percent of our region is unchurched. Most churches are Pentecostal with a few Baptist and Methodist churches. You’ll find very few “modern” or “contemporary” churches in our area. . Culture and religion are interwoven, and while mountain people believe the Bible, respect the church and welcome anyone who comes in the name of the Lord, many of them are struggling to find the hope and Grace that is available through the Gospel of Jesus. Let’s work together to share the hope of Jesus with our people.

### **Devotion 1: The Adventure**

Without a doubt, missions can be adventurous! I remember when I had the opportunity to go on my first international mission trip in college. It was going to be expensive, but I was excited. I couldn’t wait to get out of the country for the first time. I couldn’t wait to spend a week with some good friends. Of course I was a little scared as my Spanish skills were very weak. I really only knew how to ask “Where’s the bathroom?” (Which, come to find out, was a VERY important phrase, but I’ll spare you the details!)

I had heard about real poverty and I’d heard about the children who dug through dumps to make money for their family. I had heard about people who lived in shacks. My heart was pounding at the weird excitement that I had to actually see real poverty for the first time.

That trip was wonderful in so many ways. However, I must confess, my motives were wrong. You see, my heart was focused more on “my experience” rather than seeking after Jesus. My eyes were more focused on seeing the “poverty” instead of begging the Lord to show me how my heart was poverty stricken. My desires were focused far more on getting the perfect “poor-people-picture” than it was to truly seek after God and allow him to work in and through my life.

My question for you is this. What’s your motive for coming to Kentucky? Sometimes a wrong motive can be a “subconscious” thing. You don’t even know your motives are wrong! Are you more focused on the “experience” rather than seeking Jesus?

In Hebrews 11, we read about several very well known people in the Bible. Noah, Abraham, Moses, and many others. Each of these men and women had faith. They sought after God. Verse 6 says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

We ask you now. Please consider your motives. Are you stepping out in faith to serve and worship your God? Or are you just coming to get away from home and do something fun?

Perhaps you can pray a prayer similar to this:

“Lord, I truly desire to seek you on this mission trip and for the rest of my life. I truly want to live out my faith in you by serving you. Help me see the ways you want me to change, and help me change during and after this mission trip!”

Close by reading Psalm 42:1

**Questions to consider…**

What excites you the most about this mission trip?

What fears do you have?

What are some “focuses” you may have that might be a bit “off?”

### **Devo 2: Asking - WHY?**

“At Least I don’t have to live like that”

In just a few days you will be travelling to one of the poorest counties in the United States. In our area of Eastern Kentucky, the poverty rate is high. Health problems are abundant. People are struggling. Some local children live in really poor conditions. Some senior citizens are being neglected. As you ride through the hills of Eastern Kentucky, you will see some things that blow your mind. You will meet some people who will break your heart.

You may find yourself asking several questions…

“How do they live like this?”

“Why are these people poor? Can’t they just move and fix their problems?”

“Why are there really nice homes next to really nasty homes?”

“God, why do you allow this to happen?”

The Appalachian people are quite resilient. Many don’t see their housing conditions in the same way we do, and there’s nothing wrong with that.

The answer to that last question is really hard to answer. We don’t always know why God allows so many people to struggle. But, we do know that God has commanded us to do something about it when we see people hurting!

In James, he says to help the Orphans and Widows in need.

In 1 John, he says to show compassion to those without clothes and food.

In Romans 12, he says to share with the Lord's people in need and to show hospitality.

What are you going to do about this while you’re in Kentucky? What will you do when you return home?

Questions to ponder:

1. What do you have to offer a person in need? Is there something you can say or do to help them?
2. Do you have any people in need in your own neighborhood? What needs might they have?
3. Have you opened your eyes to see the needs in your hometown?

Let’s start NOW looking for ways we can meet the needs of people at home and around the world!

### **Devotion 3 - Expectations**

“This is MY mission trip! It had better be good!”

Stephen LOVED fixing things. All year long, he practiced his construction skills around the house. He helped his dad with odd jobs around the house, and was able to lay carpet, run electrical wires, and install plumbing. For a Junior in High School, Stephen was an extremely talented carpenter!

When it came time for mission trip sign ups at church, Stephen jumped on it! He was the FIRST to sign up, and made sure to tell his youth pastor that he was definitely going to work construction again this year. The last time he served on a mission trip, he helped install flooring in an older lady’s house. This year, he hoped to learn how to complete a roof!

The group arrived and it was time to find out the assignments. As the director was calling out names for the Children’s ministry, Stephen heard his name called to work at a DAYCAMP! With SNOTTY GERM INFESTED KIDS! NO WAY! He was angry. He was devastated. He was on the verge of tears, because he didn’t even pack clothes for daycamps.

He met his Ministry Track leader – Her name was Lauren. Lauren saw that Stephen was disturbed, and asked what was wrong. Stephen said with an attitude, “I HAVE WAITED ALL YEAR TO DO CONSTRUCTION AND I DO NOT WANT TO BE IN THIS GROUP!” Lauren calmly replied, “Stephen, let me explain this to you. We have a young man coming to our daycamps who is in 5th grade. He has no father at home, and no brothers and sisters. His mom is gone all the time trying to make enough money to keep a little food on the table. He is looking for a role model. When we talked to your youth pastor, he said that YOU would be the best role model for this kid. I know you wanted to do construction, but will you give daycamps a shot?”

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Simply put, Missions is NOT about you accomplishing a task. Missions is about serving. At Big Creek, we are a year-round mission center working to serve the underprivileged in this area. Since we know the area, and know the people, there are going to be times when we ask you (adults AND students) to do things that you might not be expecting to do! You may want to work construction, but we may NEED you to serve in community ministries! You may want to work with kids, but we may know of a way that you can add your gifts and experience to our community ministries! Regardless of the situation, we simply ask you to be flexible. Expect anything! You may be doing something you NEVER expected. Regardless of where you serve, regardless of what you do, God wants to change YOU first. When He changes you, He will use YOU to change others.

You may be a retired carpenter expecting to build a house. You may end up working in a nursing home so you may reach out to the residents in the home. You may be a cheerleader wanting to teach camp kids the best cheers. You may end up working on a house – so you may minister to the teenage girl who lives next door.

You may be a football player expecting to lead sports camps. You may end up moving furniture in a local school so you may build stronger ministry relationships in this community!

Regardless of what you’re asked to do, when you serve on mission, we hope you’ll serve willingly

Spend a few minutes reading Colossians 3:12-17

What can I learn from this scripture?

In What ways can I learn “peace” - even when I don’t get my way?

In what ways can I be more thankful?

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SO WHAT HAPPENED WITH Stephen?

Although Stephen was frustrated with Lauren and this whole “Big Creek” thing, he chose not to make a big fuss about it. He loaded on the van the next morning and went to daycamps. Immediately, little Sammy saw Stephen and grabbed onto his leg! For an entire week, Stephen was able to be a best friend to this kid who had none. They played games together, sang together, and shared personal stories together.

The good news is – because Stephen was willing to be obedient - little Sammy heard, and responded to, the message of the Gospel! Sammy’s life was forever changed!

# Devo 4: Humility

When I was in Middle School, I thought everything, and everybody, was dumb. I had this mindset that I knew everything. I felt only the things I was interested in were important. I would argue with people at the lunch table about who had the better card collection. Oh no, don’t get me wrong. At my table, we didn’t collect baseball cards - we collected “GARBAGE PAIL KIDS” cards. (You probably don’t even know what those are--You’re better off) We were weird kids.

Anyways, at the lunch table, we always argued and debated. “My cards are better. My favorite sports team is better. My church is better. I’m smarter. I’m more popular. I’m going to go to a better high school. I’m going to be richer than you”

I was so dumb. And to be honest, even though I was always trying to show people how great I was, in my heart I really felt pretty lame. I felt useless. I felt hopeless. Perhaps that’s why my youth leader, Lance, pulled me aside one time and said something that, of course at the time, I thought was really dumb. He said, “If you want to experience true JOY in life, you have to put Jesus first, Others second, and Yourself third!

As I look back, I realize how important that was! It’s full of truth! As servants and missionaries, we must refrain from trying to impress people with our skills, experience, and “stuff.” Rather, we should have the same attitude of Jesus. He was a humble servant!

Here are some things to keep in mind:

… **Pride is showing how much you know. Humility is showing how much you can learn.**

When you’re serving on this mission trip, make sure you’re not trying to impress people (locals or other volunteers) with your skills, knowledge of construction, the Bible, or sports. They really don’t need to know how how good you are. They need to know how good Jesus is. Try to learn more about others instead of sharing about yourself.

**… Pride is the desire to be successful. Humility is the desire to see others succeed.**

You may be better using that drill than your friend. It might be easy to grab it out of their hand so you can get the job done quicker. Perhaps you can spend a minute to teach them how to use that drill. The same idea applies to so many areas of life. Help others succeed! Don’t try to do everything so you can impress people!

**… Pride is getting things your way. Humility is letting the Lord have HIS way**

You may think you know what’s best for you. You may think you know what’s best for these people.. Truthfully, the Lord wants you to be a servant. A servant doesn’t do things “his” way - but rather, he does it the Master’s way. Learn to be a servant!

Here are some scriptures that will help show us what it means to be a humble servant:

**Colossians 3:12**

What can I learn from this? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**1 Peter 5:5**

What can I learn from this? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Romans 12:3**

What can I learn from this? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Phillipians 2:3**

What can I learn from this? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Proverbs 12:15**

What can I learn from this? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Spend a moment in prayer, asking the Lord to teach you more about humility and show you areas where you may have pride.

# Devo 5: Do THESE things!

I talked about my previous mission trip to Venezuela. It was quite the experience. Before our trip, we had many meetings to discuss the rules and expectations. Most of them were simple.

Don’t drink their water. Don’t eat the ice. Don’t lose your passport. Don’t leave the group. Don’t point with your index finger, and most definitely, DO NOT use the “OK” hand gesture!

Do What? Why would you even bother telling me not to use the “OK” hand gesture? Nobody does that!

Literally, in my first conversation with locals, my interpreter shared with me what the locals were saying, and what did I do in response? I MADE THE “OK” HAND GESTURE, nodded my head and said, “OK!” Of course, they were shocked, but they also knew that I was just an uncultured North American. To most South Americans, it would have been very awkward and offensive. Thankfully, they just laughed and weren’t upset

In Kentucky, we’re pretty similar to the rest of the United States We have our quirks, but typically, you should be able to fit in pretty well. So, today, we’re not going to give you a list of “DON’TS.” Rather, here are the things we really want you to do.

1. **Do look for the brokenness of others, but also acknowledge your own!**

You’ll likely meet hurting people. You’ll see some broken down homes. You’ll meet some challenging kids. Before you look at them and realize how broken THEY are, it’s important to realize your own brokenness. If you don’t realize your own brokenness, you are replacing love with judgement. “For ALL have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.” that includes YOU!

**2) Look for the beauty that coexists with the brokenness**

Some of the homes you’ll enter are falling apart. But the people inside have hope and joy.

Some of the residents are jobless and broke. They have family, and that’s all that matters.

Our economy is failing. But people still know how to get by and survive.

There are things wrong with our community. We know. But, we also have many locals who are trying to make a difference, and our people know how to survive difficult times. Look through the exterior surface and recognize the beauty that lies within each life and each situation.

**3) Serve those who “don’t deserve it”**

It’s easy to love the cute kid that does everything right. It’s easy to love that outgoing friendly guy. But sometimes, it’s harder to love those who are unlovable. It’s really hard to love those who are taking advantage of you.

* Seek out that child that’s not outgoing and may be hurting. Love them
* Serve that homeowner that may be ungrateful or not talkative. Love them.
* Show the person who may be rejected how Jesus (and you ) love and accet. Love them. “But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8)”

Even though we didn’t deserve God’s grace. We got it. So let’s show that same grace to others who may not “deserve it” in our eyes.

**4) Look beyond the “checklist.”**

A lot of times we think that the mission trip is just the next step or “checkbox” of a real Christian. We think that REAL christianity begins when we’ve “checked” the local mission trip, the regional mission trip, and the international mission trip (Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth).

This mission trip is not part of a checklist to prove to others you’re a good Christian. It’s a training ground. This experience will hopefully teach you to live your mission EVERY day - at home - at school - at work. In John 13, Jesus told his disciples, “I’ve given you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” He sets the example of service. It’s something we do all the time, every day. NOT just on this mission trip so we can “check” a box.

**5) Don’t worry so much about “fixing” others. Let God do the work.**

All of us have our problems and issues. If you think you have no problems or issues, that may very well be your problem! Let us all approach the Lord with humility, asking him to reveal to us the areas we are broken, so that we may be a vessel to introduce other broken people to the Jesus. He’s the only one who can “fix” our issues!

**6) Make this mission trip about God, not you.**

*Read Matthew 6:1-4.* In that scripture you’ll read how sometimes we do things to get attention for ourselves. The scriptures are clear - “Whatever you do, do it all for the Glory of God!” (1 Corinthians 10:31). Let’s not do anything that will cause others to see US rather than see God.

### Devo 6 - Unity

Phil 2:2: “Fulfill my joy by being like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind”

If you don’t like sports, this is going to be a hard devotion to follow. Never mind the fact that this is talking about the Tennessee Volunteers football team. It’s a team that - at one point - was really good.

Back in 1997, the Volunteers had a quarterback by the name of Peyton Manning. He was among the best to ever play at Tennessee. The community, media, and players loved Peyton. Everybody thought Peyton would lead us to the national championship!

Peyton was talented, yet seemed humble. He always gave others credit when things went well. He worked hard, and he did very well. He was good to the players, good to the fans, and good for the community. He was the ideal star player.

Through Peyton’s senior season, over 106,000 loyal tennessee fans would pack the stadium to watch the vols play. They won their first two games, but unfortunately, couldn’t beat their biggest rival - Florida. It was a heartbreaking loss. Through the rest of the season, they played well and fell just short of beating Nebraska in the Orange Bowl. It was devastating - because all the fans knew that we’d probably never have another player as good as Peyton, and he was going to graduate.

Fans had lower expectations the following year. Their new quarterback was younger and was the “backup” to Peyton. Several other key players graduated. But something happened. The underdog team (without a “star player”) fought. They worked together. They beat Florida. They beat Georgia. They beat Arkansas. They beat EVERYBODY! All this was done without a “star player.” It was all done by a bunch of regular college football players.

What happened during Peyton’s year? Why couldn’t they win it? We may never know. Maybe it was because everybody was relying on the “star player” to do the work. Maybe there was some resentment because Peyton got most of the attention.

It seems as if every group has a “star player” that everyone looks up to. Sometimes, that “star player” in the group is an athlete. Sometimes they’re “pretty.” Sometimes they’re popular. Sometimes they are funny.

First of all, let’s be clear. If you’re striving to be the star player and receive all the attention, we have a “Big Creek” saying for you: “GET YE THEREFORE OVER THYSELF!”

You are not doing anyone any good by trying to gain people’s attention. Colossians 3:23 says, “Whatever you do, work heartily for the LORD and not MAN!” If you’re doing things to impress others, you’re sinning. It’s that simple.

Second, you may feel jealous that you’re not getting much attention even though you do a lot for them. You are tired. You’re empty. You’re on the verge of quitting. Please remember this: Jesus calls us to serve HIM. Even though we may be tired and weary of serving others - we must remember what Jesus said in Matthew 25:34-40. Whatever we do for the “least of these” - we’re actually doing for Jesus! Don’t give up!

What we must realize is that - in the Christian world - there are no star players! **Each of us has gifts that are to be utilized for God’s glory, not our own. We don’t work for people’s “attention” but rather we do it as an act of worship! Let’s be careful to keep our eyes on Jesus and work for His glory and not our own!**

Let’s all do our share of the work.

**Questions to Ponder:**

1. Does it seem your group tends to focus on certain individuals at times? How does this make you feel?
2. How does that distract the entire group?
3. Who are some people in your group who may not be using their talents because they are ignored?
4. What can you do to kindly, lovingly, and respectfully, help develop unity in your group?