

Following *Jesus*, the Ultimate *Leader*



Leaders Guide

Group Preparation Materials for Appalachia Vision Trip

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. —Colossians 3:17

Leader's Guide

A few opening comments to leaders. . .

Thank you for taking the time to guide Appalachia Vision Trip team members into a deeper understanding of how they can become his instruments in caring for people in need. This preparation material, which focuses on the theme “Following Jesus, the Ultimate Leader,” is designed to be used before your group arrives in Appalachia. We hope you find this a valuable tool in preparing your team members to have the best experience possible during their Vision Trip.

This two-session study examines these issues:

Focusing on Poverty in the United States Is poverty in one of the world's richest nations real? In this opening section, we examine not only the reality of U.S. people who are poor, but also the common assumptions that stereotype people in need.

Embracing God's View of Leadership Strong Christian leaders with biblical worldviews are needed in all of society, and especially to care for those who are “left behind” in our culture. In this section, we'll look at what God requires of his leaders, how Christ modeled leadership, and what scripture tells us about God's heart for those who don't have the basics to live full lives.

Understanding Appalachia Europeans began moving into Appalachia many years ago, settling in the beautiful, rugged countryside of rolling hills and hallows. This area boasts a proud, independent history, but recent socio-economic changes have left many of these isolated families without the resources they need. This section will help your team better understand the people they will meet and the context in which they will be working.

Participating in God's Work One of the most important resources your team will bring on its Vision Trip is an understanding of what they will be achieving in their work through World Vision. In this section, they will see how World Vision participates in God's work by addressing the root causes of poverty—and how team members' lives will be changed along with those they are helping.

To gain maximum benefit from this preparation time, **each participant should have the team member journal**, which includes an outline and space for notes. Team members' journals also include a section that asks critical questions to help each participant define his or her motives for and expectations of his or her Appalachia Vision Trip. Consider encouraging team members to answer these questions during your preparation time together, or separately at home.

May God bless you as you embark on this life-changing adventure in caring for some of the nation's most under-resourced people. Our prayer is that as you participate in this unique ministry opportunity, each team member will grow in spiritual maturity, leadership, personal understanding, and compassion for people in need.

Session One: God's Leadership Mold

This session includes:

Part One: Focusing on Poverty in the U.S.

Part Two: Embracing God's View of Leadership

Part One: Focusing on Poverty in the U.S.

THE OBJECTIVE of this activity is to demonstrate that poverty is real in the United States, and that Christian leaders are called to care for those who are in need and hurting—just as Jesus did.

Open with Discussion: Let's talk about what we think of people who lack the basic resources.

- Why do you think some people in the United States don't have the basics they need to live?
- What are the stereotypes of people who are "poor"? (such as "they're lazy," or "they make lots of bad choices.")

TRUE or FALSE?

(Leader's note: Read the following questions. After students predict the answer, read the correct answer and explanation.)

- **One out of ten children lives in poverty in the United States.**
FALSE: Nearly TWO out of ten children live in poverty in the United States. (Poverty is defined as a family of four living on \$18,400 or less per year.)
- **One in four—or 25 percent—of the nation's homeless people are children.**
FALSE: Approximately 40 percent—more than one out of three—of the nation's homeless people are children.
- **More than half of the country's Hispanic children live in low-income families.**
TRUE: 62 percent of Hispanic children live in low-income families. (Low-income is defined as a family of four living on \$36,800 or less per year.)
- **Most poor families are poor because the parents can't or don't work.**
FALSE: 70 percent of poor families with children in the U.S. include a person who works.
- **More than half of those who receive emergency food (from places like food banks) didn't finish high school.**
FALSE: 63 percent of emergency food recipients have a high school diploma, compared with 84 percent of the general U.S. population.

Discussion:

- What surprises you about what we've just learned, and why?



Part Two: Embracing God's View of Leadership

What is a Leader?

THE OBJECTIVE of this discussion is to demonstrate the need for strong Christian leaders, especially those who care for people in need.

LEADER shares:

Today we hear the phrase “leadership gap” a lot. This means there aren't enough qualified leaders in many areas of our culture. The “gap,” many media sources tell us, is affecting politics, businesses, schools, churches, and even the media itself. More than anything, we need leaders who care for people in need.

In some capacity, we all are leaders to others—to friends, siblings, maybe children. In fact, Christian author J. Oswald Sanders says that **all Christians are leaders**: “If a leader is a person who influences people to accomplish a purpose, then every Christian is a leader, for we all influence others.” People will follow us if we lead by a godly example. Let's take a closer look at how we can become stronger leaders.

Discussion:

- How would you describe a leader?
- What difference do you think it makes to be a leader who is a Christian?



Scripture Focus: What is God looking for in a leader?

THE OBJECTIVE of this section is to encourage students to see God's view of leadership, and to know that following Jesus is the first step toward being a leader.

LEADER shares: We know from scripture that God's ways are not always peoples' ways. Jesus tells us that the first will be last. That to live we must die to ourselves. And those who want to be “greatest” must become servants. God's ideas of leadership are not the same as our culture's ideas of leadership. So let's look at what God tells us about the leaders he seeks.

Throughout the Old Testament, God sought holy leaders who would follow Him. But time after time, he found a “leadership gap.” God found a leadership gap with Saul. Listen to this verse for WHY Saul's leadership would not last:

1 Samuel 13:14: But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command.

Discussion:

- Why did God remove Saul from leadership?

God found a leadership gap in Jerusalem. Listen to this verse for what God was looking for:

Jeremiah 5:1: Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem,
look around and consider,
search through her squares.
If you can find but one person
who deals honestly and seeks the truth,
I will forgive this city.

God found a leadership gap within Israel. Listen to this verse for what God wanted someone to do:

Ezekial 22:30: I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.

God called his people, including the leaders, to care for people in need:

Psalms 82:3-4: Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy . . .

Proverbs 29:7: The righteous care about justice for the poor.

James 1:27: Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress . . .

Discussion:

- What do these verses tell us about God's priorities for his leaders?
- What do these verses tell us about God's heart for people in need?



Now let's shift to the New Testament, and Jesus.

(Leader's note: Have students break into groups of three or four. Give each group one of the following verses, and ask them to answer this question:

- What does this verse say about Jesus' priorities for his followers?
- Are the priorities any different for those who are Jesus' leaders?
- How can you follow his example and/or command given in this scripture?

Give the students four minutes for discussion, then return to the large group and allow each group to share its verse and conclusions.)

1 Peter 2:21: To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Mark 1:16-17: As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

John 10: 14-15: I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Luke 9:23-24: If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

Matthew 23:13: The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.



Applying It

Leader shares: During our daily devotion time in Appalachia, we will be looking more closely at some of the characteristics that make up a leader. Today, however, let's focus on who Jesus is as a leader.

Participants Call Out: What words come to mind when you think about Jesus? (Shepherd, Teacher, Servant, etc.) Write these words on a white board or large sheet of paper so students can see them.

Discussion:

- How do you think these characteristics relate to leadership?
- What was Jesus' life like? ("Nowhere to rest his head," spent time in relationships, took time to be alone with the Father)
- What does the way Jesus lived his life say about how we should live as leaders? And how does this contrast with how our culture's leaders often live?

Challenge

(**Leader's note:** Allow students time to reflect on the following and write their thoughts in their journals.)

God is always looking for strong leaders:

For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. —2 Chronicles 16:9

- Will you be that person God is seeking?
- Return to the characteristics you identified in Jesus. How do these words relate to the characteristics of a leader? Pick three that challenge you most. How will you work on developing these characteristics in your life beginning today?

Session Two: Joining in God's Transforming Work

This session includes:

Part One: Understanding Appalachia

Part Two: Sharing Our Resources with Others

Part One: Understanding Appalachia

THE OBJECTIVE of this section is to anticipate how leadership skills can be developed and sharpened during your time in Appalachia.

LEADER or participant reads:

Meet Justin: Justin has lived his entire life in the area we will be visiting. His self-esteem is very low, and he has few friends. Here's Justin's story:

Justin, 15, is from a single parent family. He has a loving mom but rarely sees his father, whom he does not get along with very well. Their house burned down in 2002, and a year later the family was still working to replace it. In Chestnut Ridge, doing whatever you can to make ends meet is a way of life.

Justin is a freshman at Philip Barbour High School, the only high school in Barbour County—one of the poorest counties in the country. Like most students from rural Chestnut Ridge, Justin needs help with his schoolwork. Yet he likes school, and is a cheerleader at the high school.

Despite his successes, Justin's self-esteem remains low. He often is teased or shunned by his peers, partly because of his cheerleading role. In this part of the country, guys are not cheerleaders in high school. And there's no shortage of low self-esteem in a former mining town where education often is a low priority, opportunities are rare, and money is scarce.

Unlike other local teens, however, Justin's low self-esteem has not yet turned him toward alcohol or drug abuse. Being involved with Vision Youth—part of World Vision's work in Appalachia—and accepted by the group is helping improve Justin's self-esteem.

Justin has been involved with Vision Youth for the last two years, starting when he was in middle school. He initially got involved because he needed somewhere to go and hang out with his friends. He has stayed involved because he has fun and is learning about God. He participates in many Vision Youth activities, including the weekly faith exploration and gospel proclamation sessions.

Greg Croston, a World Vision-supported youth outreach worker, has been helping him with homework whenever he can. Greg also grew up in the Chestnut Ridge area, and has experienced many of the same challenges Justin is facing. Through encouragement from World Vision staff, Greg now has the confidence and skills he needs to encourage other youth, like Justin.

Justin wants to learn more about how God's influence can make a positive difference in his life. Greg is trying to help him to hope for more, but says, "When you lose so much, it's hard to hope for more." However, Greg's own example of a changed life is a great model for Justin.

LEADER shares: Each one of you will have many opportunities to exercise your leadership skills during our time in Appalachia. Last session you chose three of Christ's characteristics to strengthen in your own life. This session, we will focus more specifically on the conditions and opportunities we will encounter in Appalachia.



Understanding Differences

(Leader's note: Before you meet, ask three participants to come up with a **short skit** that won't make sense to others. For example, they might communicate with motions or sounds that mean nothing to others. They might laugh at things that wouldn't be funny to others. Advise them to keep the skit short and simple—since it isn't supposed to make sense anyway. Here's an example to get imaginations pumping:)

An individual walks in with several cottonballs taped to his/her shirt. He/she pulls off some of the cottonballs, throws them in the air and catches them. A second individual walks in with cottonballs taped to his/her shirt, and does the same. A third individual walks in with cottonballs taped to his/her shirt. As the third person enters, the first person yells "beep-beep," and all three individuals run into each other and fall to the ground. All land on their backs and begin tossing the cottonballs into the air and catching them. The second individual yells "honk," and all three individuals jump to their feet and begin cheering as if they've won a game.

Discussion:

- What made sense in this skit?
- What didn't make sense?

LEADER shares: If what these students just did didn't make sense, it's because you didn't understand what they were doing, or why they were doing it. It could have been something they were taught from childhood; it could reflect family priorities or values. But until you understand a person's or a community's background, it can be hard to "make sense" of things you don't understand. It can be like trying to understand when someone is speaking in a language you don't know.

This misunderstanding can also exist when we get to Appalachia. We may find that things we see don't make sense based on what we know and how we live. Many of the families of Appalachia have lived in their hometowns for generations, and their families maintain unique values. They also are affected by conditions that in many ways are out of their control. Here are a few of them:

- **West Virginia** is one of the nation's poorest states, consistently ranking in the bottom tier of the country's economic scale. Of the 55 counties in West Virginia, Barbour County, where you will be working, is among the five most economically challenged counties in an already poor state.

- **World Vision’s ministry** reaches into 26 of the state’s 55 counties. Most of these areas struggle because of the closure of coal mines that once provided steady employment.
- **Family is primary.** This is a wonderful value that gives security to individuals growing up in sometimes difficult situations. However, the assumed primacy of family also can discourage individuals from “breaking out” of the family norm, getting a good education, setting solid goals, and being equipped to live a fuller life.
- **Education can be undervalued.** For years, the people in the area where you will be working depended upon coal mining for a living. Because this is hard physical labor, little emphasis was placed on developing skills that wouldn’t be used for physical labor. In some cases, individuals never learned to read or do basic math. Today, however, the coal mines have closed, and the people are left with few skills to apply to new jobs.
- **Job opportunities are limited** in these isolated communities, especially to those with mediocre educations. When the mines began closing in the 1960s, the companies that owned the mines—and many of the towns—abandoned the company stores that previously served the communities. Town residents, many whose families had lived there for generations, were left with no jobs and few resources. Many couldn’t afford to own cars, so moving was difficult. And the pervasive value placed on family discouraged others from moving to find work. Many who lacked education because they assumed they’d spend their lives working in the mines weren’t qualified for other jobs.
- **A shortage of resources** keeps individuals from thriving. While the people of Appalachia are hard workers, they often lack basic resources to access the things that would improve their lives. These may be things we take for granted, such as transportation to a job, access to a telephone, or even decent housing that gets them through the cold West Virginia winters. Today the people remain under-resourced. Yet with your help, they are rebuilding communities and lives.

LEADER shares: During your time in Appalachia, how we respond to things that are new or don’t make sense to us will be a choice we make. Now we’ll look at how the characteristics of Jesus we discussed in the last session can be reflected in our lives as we work together and get to know the people in the community we will be working in.



Part Two: Participating in God's Word

Defining Poverty

THE OBJECTIVE of this section is to allow team members to understand what God is achieving through World Vision in Appalachia, and how they will participate in that work. This work focuses on “transformational development,” which strives to address the root causes of poverty through social, physical, and spiritual change, or “transformation.”

Discussion:

- How would you define poverty?

LEADER shares: World Vision defines poverty as deprivation in community life, where people:

- Lack access to needed resources
- Are excluded from full participation in the culture
- Are isolated from relationships required to fulfill their God-given potential

All of these things cause unacceptable suffering and struggle.



Transforming Lives

(Leader's note: Before this session, create signs that say “transformational journey begins,” “social transformation,” “physical transformation,” and “spiritual transformation.” Appoint a participant to wear or hold each sign and read the matching section below.)

LEADER shares: Considering the needs of people who lack enough resources, do you ever wonder if what we do to help people really makes a difference? Once we leave, aren't they still in need of resources? What difference will we really make in Appalachia this summer? If we were the only people working in Appalachia, our impact might be small. But as we join others working there, our impact becomes part of something huge that's changing lives in Appalachia. God has given us many resources, and as we share God's resources, others' lives are changed.

When lives are changed for the better not just for today, but for the future as well, this is called “transformational development,” and it's how God does His work through World Vision all over the world. Transformational development works in the isolated communities of Africa, in the slums of India, and in the war-torn Middle East. And it works here in the United States, too. Transformational development is what you will be doing in Appalachia, and it includes social, physical, and spiritual components that address not just the symptoms of poverty, but the root causes. Let's look a little closer at the different components that come together in lasting change:

(Appointed participants read:)

Transformational journey begins: World Vision believes that the future of United States' communities can be shaped and changed forever when community members work together, solving local problems as they discover their God-given potential. Every community has a heritage, a rich history of stories that reflect the vigor of that community. In Appalachia, the people have worked hard for generations in one of the nation's toughest industries: coal mining. Many of the towns they now live in used to be owned by the companies that ran the coal mines. When the companies left, company stores and other support systems often closed down, leaving the people without jobs or many resources. Yet these Appalachian communities still have assets. They have strong families, willingness to work, and faith in God. They also know their needs better than anyone else. As we come alongside these communities, we are working with them, not for them. In this way, the people gain a new sense of community ownership and pride in what they have accomplished.

Social transformation: Every community has leaders—pastors, parents, and those who naturally lead the community. World Vision helps bring these leaders together and guides them along the journey of identifying community needs and priorities. As these leaders come together and involve other members of the community, the entire community lights up, set ablaze by new opportunities and progress.

Physical transformation: Physical transformation is about helping communities move toward health and stability. In the United States, health and stability are achieved through stable jobs and income. But a family at rock bottom can be a long journey away from landing a stable job. Assistance must begin with meeting basic needs like food and shelter. Once these needs are met, education, life skills, and job training become relevant. And residents are equipped to realize their God-given potential. The community is strengthened as people work together, leading toward lasting change.

Spiritual transformation: World Vision believes that spiritual renewal and increasing awareness of God's love and grace are at the heart of a community's transforming journey. The most effective tools for community change is the church, a long-standing, trusted institution in most communities. As Christian community leaders, churches, and World Vision staff and volunteers (that's you!) demonstrate God's love in what they do, what they say, and how they live their lives, local residents are inspired to seek God's truth and discover his promises for life in all its fullness.

LEADER shares: So what does participating in transformational development mean for us? When we arrive in Appalachia, we will become part of this process of transformation. Not only will you be helping others to change for the better, you will be changing for the better as well. Why? Because Transformational Development works on those who help as well as those who are being helped.

An essential part of transformational development is transformed relationships. This means:

- We are in right relationship with one another.
- We are in right relationship with God.
- We maintain a right relationship with God's creation.

These parts of transformation transcend physical need. While we may not be physically in need, we may benefit from working on relationships. We may see that we change our assumptions and our view of the world based on our experiences in Appalachia. We may value God's creation more. And we may return home with a greater sense of the world's needs and our ability to care for those in need. **As we are changed by this experience, God is transforming US as well as those we are working with in Appalachia. God will do his part during our time in Appalachia, and we are called to do our part as well: To reflect Jesus in what we do, what we say, and how we live our lives.**



Applying It

Participants Call Out: Ask participants to call out one-word descriptions based on the bulleted questions below. Have someone write these down on a white board or large sheet of paper so participants can see them. Tell participants they cannot give a description that's already been used in answer to other questions in this group of questions.

You will be not only participating in construction, but actually pointing people you meet to Christ by:

- **What you do:** What should our actions say about us?
- **What you say:** What should our words say about us?
- **How you live:** What should our lives say about us?

(**Leader's note:** Allow students time to reflect on the following and write their thoughts in their journals.)

Which of these descriptions is most important to you as you leave for Appalachia? Choose three, write them down, and begin now to develop them in your life.

