

# How Mission Trips Shaped My Faith and Calling



Paul Kim, MD

"Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth." ••1 John 3:18 (NIV)

I struggle with this verse everyday with my children. I want my boys to understand and appreciate the words "I love you" because of the actions that are founded on them. In the same way, faith is easy to keep in the realm of ideas or words•• something we believe or say ••but far harder to live out in concrete ways. Mission trips helped shift that for me, showing God's love in a tangible and practical way, where service became a living expression of faith that shaped not only how I helped others, but how I found my calling as a pediatrician intensive care physician.

My first introduction to a mission trip took place early in high school. With my local youth group, we went to South Korea and Taiwan ••a place that felt both exciting and unfamiliar. What I remember most, though, isn't the travel or even the work ••it's the children. Our team spent time with students at an orphanage, trying to connect despite our language barriers. We played games, laughed and bonded, shared our faith how we could and found ways to communicate without words.

I did not appreciate it at the time, but I found myself drawn to helping children especially to those

in need. Whether it was volunteering at shelters or soup kitchens or at hospitals, my focus was on trying to support them however I could. Even it was just attention or connection, I did what I could at the time and in those moments, I began to understand that showing up for someone, especially a child, can matter more than saying the right thing.

In college, my experience in the Philippines deepened that understanding. Our team helped renovate a local school and orphanage, and while the physical work was meaningful, it was the students who left the greatest impact on me. Every day, they would gather around us •• curious, energetic, and full of life. Even in a space that needed repairs, they carried a sense of excitement about learning that I often took for granted. We also did medical and spiritual outreach into the community, and we'd see people severely impacted by disease that could have been preventable with simple, proactive interventions.

While, I was honored to have a role and be a support for these children, I found myself called to do a more. How could I help these children particularly the ones that could not help themselves? The answer, for me, was in medicine. I went to medical school to become a pediatrician and to specialize in critical care medicine. With this

training, I currently work at a safety net hospital that accepts all children regardless of their ability to pay and helps provide them with high quality care in the most trying times of their lives.

As a physician, mission work has taken on a more medical focus. I have gone on medical mission trips as part of a larger cardiac surgery team to El Salvador and Mexico. We identify children with congenital heart defects, repair them, and care for them post-operatively through their recovery. We also train staff so that they could develop the skill set to do this work themselves in the future. In some cases, the children we operated on would have died shortly had we not been there. In other cases, we extend their life expectancy by decades. We give children a chance to grow up, to play, to live a fuller life. These moments are real ••not abstract service. This was directly impacting the lives of children and their families in profound ways.


Children reveal something essential about faith. Their trust, their joy, and their ability to receive love without hesitation reflect the kind of posture we are called to have. In serving them, I am also reminded of this. My work is not about being a savior. That role belongs to Christ alone. Whether playing games with children in Taiwan, helping build a school in the Philippines, or supporting life-saving care for young patients in El Salvador and Mexico, the calling is the same ••to love, serve, and be present. And in that presence, I found my own perspective expanding appreciating resilience, hope, and joy in ways I had never considered.

I continue that work at home here in the states. Working with children in mission settings taught me patience, empathy, and the importance of

presence ••qualities that are essential in clinical care. I do my best to listen deeply, observe beyond words, and meet children where they are, not just medically but emotionally. Those lessons have shaped how I interact with patients and families every day, reminding me that care is never just about treatment ••it's about relationships, trust, and compassion.

Each of these trips shaped me, but not in the ways I fully expected. They didn't just show me need ••they showed me joy. They didn't just reveal hardship ••they revealed resilience and the ways faith can flourish even in challenging circumstances. They forced me to confront my assumptions, to grow in patience and empathy, and to recognize that serving others is inseparable from growing myself.

I do not see mission trips as moments where I went to give, but as moments where I was invited to witness something deeper ••faith expressed through the lives of children, the love of God in action, and the transformation that occurs when we step beyond our familiar world.

If there is one lesson that continues to stay with me, it is this: to love in action is to reflect the heart of Christ ••and in doing so, we often find our own hearts changed. 

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