

DR. JACOB YOUNG

MISSIONAL  
U

Life As a Mission Trip

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# Introduction

## *What is Missional?*

Welcome to Missional University! Let's start your training with the word "missional." The first time I heard this word, I lovingly yelled at my good friend Paul Stark for using it, informing him that he cannot just make up words. But now the word is everywhere. Here, in writing, I acknowledge that Paul was right and I was wrong!

I don't know if I have ever seen a bigger ministry buzz word than missional. As I meet people in ministry around the world, it's the word on the tip of everyone's tongue. But as I get into conversations, I hear many different definitions, ideas, philosophies, and lived-out practices. What does missional really mean?

Wikipedia<sup>®</sup> quotes the Oxford dictionary and says that missional means "relating to or connected with a religious *mission*." Now, I do not want to offend Oxford – and more importantly, Wikipedia – but I think missional is so much bigger than that. It's not a program or an event. It's a lifestyle – a way of life that seeks purpose and meaning in what others see as randomness and coincidence. And here is the Missional U working definition: *Missional means living life as a mission trip*. Every moment of our lives could be a moment to share the Gospel in our words and actions. Every moment. There is no coincidence. There is no accident. There is no off switch to it. Every moment can be a moment to share the Gospel.



## The Key



How many people can you squeeze into one elevator? During a mission trip to Alaska, my group learned the answer to this question the hard way, in what ended up being one of the more terrifying events of my ministry. I had brought 19 students and three adults on a trip to connect with a church and the community on the Kenai Peninsula. After one particularly long day, we met together for group processing and Bible study, and then around 11 P.M. the students headed up to bed, ready for a good night's rest. Exhausted and not wanting to wait, all 19 students decided to climb into the elevator at once. Now, I should explain that this particular elevator was not located in a luxury hotel. It was in a small, four-story motel in middle-of-nowhere, Alaska. It was the kind of elevator where one might feel comfortable with about five or six people inside – certainly not 19!

I was down the hall in a meeting with my adult leaders, processing the events of the day and preparing for the next, when suddenly we heard a loud, metallic BOOM – followed immediately by screams of terror. Those screams still resound in my head. They were more piercing than anything I had ever heard. I ran down the long hallway as the screams continued. I quickly learned that the commotion was coming from the elevator shaft. The elevator cable had broken, and every single student I had brought on the trip was stuck in an elevator in middle-of-nowhere, Alaska! By the mercy and

## As the Church Burns



“Jake,” said the familiar but weary voice on the phone, “the church has burned down.” The voice belonged to Pastor Reno Johnson, a profound spiritual, political, and cultural leader on the White Mountain Apache Reservation. I have been inspired by this man in so many ways over the years – but I have never heard so much pain in his voice.

His beautiful church was gone. It had been destroyed by an arsonist’s fire – most likely set by troubled teens out looking for something to do. This church was truly a mosaic of ministry, as different groups from all over the country had assisted in the building, furnishing, and decorating of it. It was the premier church in the little town of Canyon Day on the reservation, and the apple of Pastor Reno’s eye. Nothing compared to the beauty of this building.

It takes a lot to leave me speechless. But this news really impacted me. I didn’t know what to say, or how to respond. Anything I could think of felt inadequate and overly simplified. It’s like the feeling you get when someone close to you loses a loved one, and you find yourself desperately reaching for words that sound helpful or comforting enough. As I held the phone to my ear, I closed my eyes, and so many memories of that building flashed through my mind.

## Top Ten Ways to Ruin a Mission Trip



### *Keep on Schedule*

Americans love their schedules. To survive in our culture, it is essential to be on time when you have appointments and commitments. Our work days are scheduled right down to the minute. We can't seem to function without our planners and calendars in front of us at all times. But not every culture is that way. While serving in Hawaii, I learned about "Hawaiian Time" – which means it starts when everyone gets there. In Alaska, I learned about "Alaskan Time" – which also means it starts when everyone gets there. In Apache, I learned about "Apache Time"... Guess what that means? When we travel to different regions and try to force our schedules on these cultures, we miss out on opportunities to connect, build relationships, and share the Gospel. We see gaps of unscheduled time and automatically assume that they are wasted, unproductive moments. But often, what we perceive as doing "nothing" is actually a very significant "something" to those in a different cultural context.

I had an intern who once led a mission team to Apache. Every single person in our group had more experience on the reservation than did the leader, but due to my youngest daughter's birth I was unable to go and sent the intern as the