

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
“The Experience of Service”
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Galatians 6:7-10

Love, sweat, and tears is what it took of me. One week, eighteen people, and temperatures over ninety degrees everyday: my Mexico mission trip was one for the books.

The sweat emphasized how sultry it is the closer to the equator you are. With hours of work and sunshine on our strong backs, we pushed through our task of building a school. Taking a break in the shade of the partially-constructed cement school, I looked around and couldn't help myself but smile. Even though the group of high schoolers and adults were all going through their own internal battles, we were there on the forefront of one giant one. Putting together a permanent part of an everlasting school that would educate kids for generations and generations down the line. Even with the sweat and stink radiating off our tired bodies, our hearts and souls were being replenished and renewed for our hard work. God had seen our dedication and lifted us and all the workers up.

The hot tears falling down from my tired eyes reminded me of how little I knew about the future. We were building a school -- a university no less -- for their future, but what about mine? I felt simply like a pawn in the game of life, after finding out that I got a low score on my ACT, and that could put me in some college where I knew I wasn't meant to be. I knew I was better than that. When my dad accidentally told me my score on the fifth day of the Mexico trip, I simply nodded and knew to move on and push it aside. I was in Mexico for three reasons: to embrace another culture completely, to help build a school so hundreds of people could get an opportunity that they only dreamed about before, and to feel God's presence in not only myself but in everyone else. I simply couldn't think about myself and my future; but that night I couldn't hold it in anymore. In my beautifully handmade hammock, swinging softly to the rhythm of the fans overhead, I couldn't help myself but feel bad. I knew for a fact that getting a heart-wrenchingly low score wouldn't get me into the college I so desired, and because of one test, my life would be over -- I would never become the artist I knew I was meant to be. But how silly and selfish to think that. I was not alone in my moment of anxiety. Being surrounded by such awe-inspiring people, swinging around me in hammocks, sound asleep, put me at peace. I was determined. God's light filled me up and I knew what I had to do: not only would I retake it, but I *would* succeed; if not for me, then for them.

Without love in my heart, I wouldn't have made it through that week. Loving everyone is easy for me. My open heart allows me to do so, so from the adorable kids in the town we entertained nightly (I couldn't understand the locals thanks to the language barrier and my decision to learn French instead of Spanish) to my peers, friends, and family that surrounded me that week. Juana was her name, the little girl I clicked with the quickest. Her genuine smile was utterly contagious, making my time with her unimaginably fun, my heart bubbling with life every moment; her passion for sidewalk chalk and beating me in silent games of tic-tac-toe was admirable and pushed me and my love for kids further. I saw God's creation right in front of me and saw him shining through her. Leaving her was the hardest -- with the bond of our temporary butterfly tattoos and permanent bond of love and laughter -- but I knew with the work our church and I did that week, we would send her to a more promising future.

I knew she wasn't the only one heading in the right direction with a future of opportunities.

Our church has been going to Leona Vicario for over 15 years, and when I went for my first time this summer, I truly saw God. God's creation through God's creatures, making a future so promising for my new friends in Mexico. I saw God's work through my friends as they worked their heads off, and strongly, *strongly* recommend this adventure of a lifetime to anyone on the fence about this. You will learn so much about yourself and your capabilities you never knew you had, and you'd learn about God and what his true gifts to the world are, big and small...you can make a difference.