
A Wealth of Talents
Reflections on the Meaning of Service

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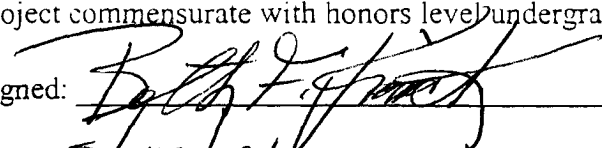
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I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

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Introduction

“Tell them. Let them know about the needs of the people here. Let them know how blessed they are, and let them know that they can help.” We were sitting in the back of a hot, crowded bus on our way from the capital to the border of Honduras when a Baxter student spoke those words to me. I have not forgotten his words, and this is my attempt to act upon them. I apologize for having to put my experience into only words and pictures. If I were able to impart to you, every thought, every moment, every act, every nuance of life I shared during those two months, I would do so with willing generosity so that you might understand that much more the joys of service and the necessity of it outside our comfort zone of the United States. That not being possible, I can only hope that this patchwork of events and thoughts will not be a mere conglomeration of hodgepodge but will be woven into something meaningful that will touch your soul, your emotions, and make you step back and wonder about the glass bubble that you live in as a resident under Old Glory. I offer no guarantees that you will understand it, will like it, or will find it a pleasurable read. I only ask that you try it and that you try to take yourself out of your bubble and into the lives of those in this story.

In the summer of 2003, I had the opportunity to embark on what would become one of the greatest experiences of my life. For two months I lived in Honduras serving as a missionary at a medical clinic in Tegucigalpa. It was not my first time to travel there for mission work nor would it be my last. In 1998, bright-eyed and hopeful with a year

The Call and Purpose of Service

Suppose your boss approached you one day and asked you to come in to work for the next two months for little or no pay. Suppose he told you that you must leave your family during these two months and relocate to another location thousands of miles away on another continent to live in unfavorable conditions that include no hot showers, no television, and a high threat of disease or illness. Finally, suppose he told you that though your work would be under-appreciated and subject to suspicion by those around you, that you would find joy in this work. You would probably turn in your resignation and leave the company, citing that your boss' marbles rolled out the door with the last payroll.

Yet, that is exactly what I did and what many others have done in the name of service. So why is service not just an un-paid job? Why is it that so many feel the call to serve and so many find satisfaction in the sacrifice of time, money, and self that service requires? From my perspective, it is because service gives one purpose. To live a life without purpose is to live without having reason to live. Everyone needs something to motivate him or her to strive for the next moment and to live for the next day.

The situation described above is my own. My boss was God and He called me to serve Him for two months in Honduras. I left my family, friends, and all the comforts of living in the United States for the conditions of a third world nation, all done in the name

academic abilities and talent with service in a synergistic manner to better the lives of those around me. In giving the use of my talents to serve others, I would discover that I gained more through the efforts of my service than that which I gave.

Send Me

As the alarm sounded in the wee hours of the morning, I forced myself from under the warm covers of my bed. As I prepared to go to the airport, I thought to myself, "What have I gotten myself into?" I was about to say goodbye to my parents and fly thousands of miles away to another country instead of enjoying a warm Southern summer in the comfort of my hometown. Yet, as I left my parents behind at the security checkpoint, I realized I was leaving many things behind that would hinder me from serving God. I looked forward to this time of liberation, a time free from the burdens of school, relationships, and the quotidian details of life that always seem to consume my time rather than those of a nobler cause.

When I made the commitment to come, I was uncertain as to why I was doing so or what I would do when I arrived. I only knew that something inside me was deeply moved to spend a summer in Honduras volunteering at a medical clinic. In one of my earlier trips to Honduras a few years before, one of the wise, older ladies gave me a valuable piece of advice:

First Days

If I ever doubted that I should be in Honduras that summer, my doubts were quickly removed when I arrived. As I was given the tour of the medical clinic, I learned that the nurse had resigned a few weeks before. I was by no means a nurse, but my experience working as a volunteer school nurse in an inner-city school and managing the clinic as the service component for my Service Learning class and my experience as an accounting assistant for a summer job equipped me well for handling the pre-clinic duties of pulling charts, filing, and performing basic pre-clinic procedures such as taking blood pressure, weight, and primary symptoms.

At Baxter, a university for Biblical studies where I was to stay located next door to the clinic, I learned that my purpose in staying there was not in vain. I was to stay in the married student apartments with the wife of one of the students and her two children while her husband was still away for two more months completing a missionary apprenticeship program in Ecuador. Discouraged from the absence of her husband for five months, Ana was delighted to have someone over the age of five to converse with and keep her company, even though my Spanish was not up to par even with the children's Spanish.

As I lay on my bed that night in the stifling heat with one of the children sleeping in the bed below me and the other one on a bed next to her, I thought about how I should

stay, it would be these mealtimes that I would cherish. They would become times of sharing in the lives of the students and learning about each other.

The students left for class, and I left to begin my work in the clinic. Daily the work at the clinic would begin with a morning devotional, singing, and time of prayer. Even though not all of the staff were of the same religious belief as the clinic director, they all saw the importance in beginning each day on focusing on the clinic's main purpose: to use medical care as a means to show God's love for others. The first morning as the assistant director translated for me, I felt like an outsider intruding on their personal time, neither knowing the songs nor what was being expressed in the devotional. The last morning I was there, I would sing the songs as if I had grown up knowing them and tell the staff in Spanish how much they all meant to me, how they made me feel like family, and how special this opportunity had been for me.

The morning was busy, and things were disorganized for the first few hours. The doctors, used to having a nurse around, were unfamiliar with the pre-clinic procedures, and it was the receptionist who had no previous medical experience who showed me the methods of charting and taking patient histories. This small wood-paneled, tile-floored room would become my office for the next two months. As with the small, badly-painted, carpeted clinic at the inner-city school, it was here that I would learn many things about medicine that can never be taught in the classroom. My teachers would not be highly educated professors but rather, my patients. To say that the first morning went smoothly and that I enjoyed every moment would be an exaggeration. It was frustrating

university to help the other girl intern prepare for a banquet that night. With the onset of the afternoon, came the onset of the rain. It is true that the rainy season actually exists. I was thankful that I had my umbrella, packed as an afterthought two nights ago. Even though it poured and the roofs leaked in the two-story cafeteria, the rain could not drown out the twenty male voices of the choir performed for those attending the banquet. Their voices resonated throughout the cafeteria in a medley of praise and testimony of their hearts. Some were songs that had been translated from their English counterparts; the rest had no English equivalent, and these moved me the most for they were the Latin Americans' own. There is something about a song that expresses the feelings and sentiments of a people more than any written or spoken word alone could ever achieve. I would come to learn that these songs and singing would become a means of connecting me, of empathizing, with this culture in which I had been immersed.

I checked my email in the computer lab but sent no replies except an email to my parents, letting them know that their daughter was capable of traveling five hours and another world away from the life I had left behind. The culture and environment in the United States was different. I wanted to establish myself in this new culture and to see what my life here would be like before trying to relate my experiences back to those who could not understand.

I returned to the apartment, being careful to avoid the large, recently developed puddles. The small waterfall formed by the creek that ran through the campus was flowing like a gallon of chocolate milk tipped over the edge of a table. I was thankful

Morning Devotionals

Toward the end of the first week and after investing many hours in service at the clinic and in the study of Spanish, I was spent. In my attempts to serve and adjust to the society here, I had forgotten my spiritual interests and the main focus of my being here. After taking my shower and trying to effectively utilize the thirty minutes I had before breakfast, I decided to have a private devotional. I left the apartment and snuck around to the backside of the cafeteria where there was a large, uncovered, stone amphitheatre. I stole up the stairs and seated myself on the top row. The sun was beginning its morning voyage across the sky, and the sounds of morning tasks filled the air. From my vantage point I could see most of the campus, but no one knew of my presence except the large black birds in the tree overlooking the waterfall. The married students were getting their children ready for school, and the single students, like most typical university students, had slept in and were now rushing to take showers and get dressed before breakfast was served. I was alone; it was a time to share between me and my God.

There is something about morning that gives a sense of freshness and renewal. Morning lends itself to new, unmarred thoughts. I found the serenity of my surroundings and the time of day perfect for spending time in the Word and in prayer. At that time, my mind was clear and free from any problems that might present themselves later in the

think, perhaps to ask himself these very questions and perhaps to reflect on the experiences of his brief time here.

Nightly Reflections

Just as I had begun the mornings in thought so did I finish the nights. I was determined to capture each day in the confines of a few pages of a lined diary. I knew that I wanted to reflect on the way I felt and thought during my stay, and I did not want to return to the United States viewing my time here as some incredible dream or as some “pat-me-on-the-back” mission trip. My journal became one of my most valued possessions while in Honduras and accompanied me throughout my trip. Though I had kept a journal on previous trips, it was in a class on Service Learning at the University of Tennessee where I really learned the art and importance of reflection through journaling.

In that class we had to record our service experiences in a journal. I learned that reflection allows a person to come to a deeper understanding of social and cultural issues addressed through service, which ultimately leads to the synthesis of new ideas and knowledge. In Robert Coles book *The Call of Service*, he aptly sums up the idea with the statement, “I think part of doing [community] service is this—to be stopped in your tracks sometimes because you’ve seen so much you ordinarily wouldn’t, and you take time out and try to look at that big picture you don’t even want to see,” (Coles 275). Daily I was stopped in my tracks. In our rat race society, reflection does not come

The Brigades

“Brigades” was the term coined for the many groups that traveled to Honduras for a week or two to serve in either the clinics or at the university. Like their military counterparts, the members worked together to accomplish as much as they could in the name of service. When the first brigades arrived, I had not seen another North American in over a week, except for the two interns living at Baxter. I was looking forward to working with them but at the same time I felt apprehensive. Even in the span of a few short days, I did not feel so much like I was from the U.S. though I wasn’t from Honduras either. When you leave your own culture, your own comfort zone, you gain a new perspective of where you left and where you are. It reminded me of something one of my professors said once in a class when corrected for an error on the board, “I am sorry. I could not see it [the error] because I was too close to the board. Now that I have stepped away, I have a clearer view. I can see what you saw on the board.” We live alongside the board everyday and like students who have never moved away from home and do not appreciate what home provides, we cannot appreciate what we have been given until we leave. We cannot examine the long-held truths and idealisms handed down to us because we have never been presented with anything otherwise. By stepping out of my culture, I had the opportunity to examine it more objectively and to more truly see its characteristics.

way to prepare the bags of staples (which included individually bagging a certain amount of sugar, beans, and rice to place in the overall food bag), was not to work individually at preparing the bags, but to work as a group, each member putting a particular item in each bag. In their efforts to serve, they forgot their individual differences and became a unified group of people, united in their efforts.

At the end of the week, many would be ready to return to their families, to the guarantee of a hot shower, to the knowledge that they could drink from any faucet without worry of what might happen later. Others, like myself the year before, looked at me wistfully and wished that they were in my role, wishing that they could leave the quotidian things that hindered them in our fast-paced society and see things from the other side as I was doing.

When the brigade from my home church arrived, the very church that had been my initial contact with Honduras, I went with some of the staff to the airport to welcome them. I expected to be elated to greet the people I had known for years, but upon seeing them walk through the gate, I felt mixed emotions. I had considered staying a few nights with my group in the hotel, but I realized that I would rather spend what little time I had developing relationships with those who I had met in Honduras instead of enjoying the comforts of a hotel and time spent with people who I would see in a few weeks.

Though I had known part of the group for the majority of my life and considered them like family, I felt distant from them. I had only been in Honduras for a month, but I had changed. No longer could I view the mission field as a week-long trip to serve poor

here and work for a week without pay, but you just don't get it." Then I realized that perhaps just the act of coming here was stepping out of their comfort zone. Perhaps their very coming was a metamorphosis of sorts. They had not had the fortune to see all the pieces. They only knew how to contribute and make their piece of the puzzle the best piece possible. Perhaps they had never learned how to think, only to do, or perhaps their thinking and doing was not the same as my experience. I decided, instead that I would show them what I had experienced and what I had learned in whatever opportunity presented to me. This is what Christ had done. He had every right to shout, "You just don't get it. You just don't understand what my Father meant about serving." Instead, he humbled himself and became like us, taking on the nature of a servant so that we might understand the meaning of service (Philippians 2).

The morning of the last day my home church was in Honduras, some of the leaders of the group (men that had been coming for years and had an understanding of what service here meant even if they could not understand what the people said) and I went to the nearby grocery store to buy commodities like vanilla and coffee for those in the United States. As we were leaving the store, one of the men asked me, "So, is there anything you miss about home?"

I paused and thought. Besides family and friends there was nothing I truly desired that I had left behind. My only possessions were contained in a backpack and two black suitcases. "No," I answered him, "There is nothing I really miss."

"Then," he paused, "You are in the right place."

cracked, clay pot ever in existence. Too many cracked clay pots try to become like the gilded vases and satisfy neither their role as a pot nor their dreams of becoming a vase. They transform themselves into some ridiculous mess of gilding and glaze, trying to obscure their clay base and finding fulfillment in nothing, neither able to be a pot nor a vase. Contentment is that we appreciate our characteristics and realize that though they may not be as commendable or extravagant as that of the vase, they have their own merits and means of serving.

friendship. Her name was Josefina, and she was a mother of three half-grown children. Her husband had passed away a number of years ago in a car accident, and since then she was left on her own to raise the three children. Each morning she would enter the pre-clinic room to sweep and mop, excusing herself and not wanting to hinder me in any way by her service. She was a woman with a sweet, soft voice that reflected her amiable nature. I would thank her for her efforts, and sometimes if the clinic was empty of patients, we would chat for a few minutes. I saw that though she had little of monetary value, she had a faith much richer than many of the wealthy I knew. She shared her dreams of taking her children to the north coast and showing them the beach. She expressed concern about having enough money to pay for her children's school supplies for the coming school year.

Despite her lackluster job, her sufferings in life, or having few possessions, she never complained. This woman knew the meaning of contentment and therefore, happiness. She always would tell me with a sweet smile, "God will provide." When the visiting plastic surgeon removed a mole off her face, she not only thanked him for his efforts but gave thanks to God for bringing the surgeon to the clinic to provide this opportunity. I felt ashamed at times; how often do I remember to thank those who serve me much less remember to always give thanks to God for even the little things. This woman who had every reason to become bitter about her life, had instead learned to be content and thankful for what she did have.

bought with hard-earned money. As we sat there in the house, enjoying the meal and sharing our lives, my eyes gazed at the walls and the numerous pictures with inspirational sayings carefully hung on each wall. As we made the walk back to the clinic, I thanked Josefina for her kindness and hospitality in opening her home to me and serving lunch. She just smiled and said, "You're welcome. It was my pleasure." I thought about how this simple meal exhibited to me how selfless a servant heart is and how true service does not expect anything in return; rather, how the servant often finds pleasure simply in the act of serving.

The Patients

What is Your Problem?

As part of my duties in preparing the patients' charts, I had to ask the patients the reason that brought them to the clinic. Instead of complying with the directions given to them and stating the major problem, for many of the women, this would open the floodgates of a sea of problems and symptoms. I would patiently listen for over a minute or two as they told me of unspecific symptoms of reoccurring stomachaches and headaches and generalized pain and occasional fever and sore throats. As I listened and pondered on why these women could not follow a simple direction and succinctly tell me their one major problem, I was reminded of my little patients at the inner-city clinic.

Roshaunda never acted sick; therefore, something must be wrong. I took Roshaunda's temperature, and it was normal. It was about this time that she screamed out, "My brother's in the hospital!" I had counseled Roshaunda's brother just the week before about his many food allergies and his eczema. I learned that he had been placed in the hospital that day because his body would not respond to the treatment for eczema and that he would have to be schooled at home due to the large amounts of allergens present at school. Roshaunda's grandmother arrived shortly thereafter and took her home. By then, we had talked awhile, and she had calmed down and even managed to crack a smile. I can find no clearer example where it is evident that a person's physical problems are shown as manifestations of their social and emotional problems. Our emotional and physical burdens are intertwined, each affecting the other in the presentation of what we call "health".

In some instances, it is not a round, white tablet or a pink and blue pill that remedies the patient's problem (though sometimes these must be given because we often expect something material for our time and money but this is another matter that I will not discuss at this time). Instead, it is an ear that will listen and a mouth that will give words of reassurance that make the patient feel self-worth, and alleviates a patient's illness.

My Own Health

During my second day serving in the clinic, an asthmatic elderly lady entered the clinic, complaining of respiratory problems. I took her weight and blood pressure and wrote the information in her chart and sent her back out into the waiting room to see the doctor. Later, Marta the receptionist beckoned me to leave the pre-clinic room and help her in the back with assembling a nebulizer. She had not the slightest clue as to how it operated, but the doctor wanted the lady to have a treatment using the machine. Though not familiar with this machine, I understood the basic mechanism, having dealt with asthma during adolescence. After a few moments of trying to finagle a series of hoses and plastic pieces into a working piece of equipment, we were successful. Marta handed the lady the breathing apparatus and left her to sit on the bench. The lady seemed somewhat confused as to what to do. Though I still had not mastered the language, I remembered enough vocabulary from a Medical Spanish class I audited at the university to convey to her that I had suffered from asthma and knew what was happening. A look of relief washed over her face as I told her to breathe slowly and deeply.

When the plastic surgeon was practicing in the clinic for a week, we had many women come to the clinic with ganglion cysts embedded in their wrists. As part of the screening procedure, I had to explain to them the options and the possibility that surgery might not prevent a reoccurrence of the cyst. One lady in particular was extremely nervous about having the surgery and the possibility that the cyst might return.

and expressing their knowledge with a series of penciled in black circles; however, many of them could not explain how to apply those facts to a situation in life. In my experience with using my talents to serve others in the inner city clinic and in Honduras, I would see the application of what I had learned in class and the conglomeration of facts were no longer something to be memorized and forgotten after the test; instead, they were engrained in my mind so that I could use that information the next time to better serve others.

Reflection on the Elderly

When an elderly lady of seventy years and eighty four pounds came in to be seen, I was somewhat in awe. Looking at this frail lady, at her thin pencil arms covered by a worn sheath of brown, wrinkled, skin and at her soft, dark, ageless eyes and realizing the many obstacles she overcame in life, I could not help but have respect for her. I thought of every disease her body had fought, every time of hardship and hard labor she had endured, yet she still was alive.

Human life amazes me. Each day we are confronted with innumerable chances that could take our life. Any number of things could happen to us and sometimes do, yet we continue to survive. Even when we increase our odds by making irrational decisions or taking risks in the name of adventure, somehow the majority of us survive to see the

from mine. From my first days there, as I walked down the drive back to the apartments each day after serving in the clinic, David and his sister Estefani would greet me with arms spread wide filled with child's love as they firmly wrapped around my body in a hug.

Their encouraging hugs and wide grins were something I had grown to look forward to each day. Now, I could in a sense repay those many hugs as I helped the doctor remove David's stitches. David remained calm throughout the brief procedure, trusting me as I cleaned around the wound and helped with the stitch removal. I gave his father some samples and supplies to keep the wound clean as it continued to heal. He thanked me, but it was I who should have thanked him for the opportunity to repay the kindness his family had shown me.

During the week of the first brigade, one of the students I had had befriended at Baxter developed a severe sore throat. Like many males, most of the Baxter students would rather "tough it out" than admit that they were sick. One morning at breakfast that week, my friend Cesar confessed to me that he was going to the clinic that afternoon because he was supposed to perform with the chorus that weekend and could not do so in such a condition. Cesar was one of the students who knew English well but was patient enough to listen to my attempts to converse in Spanish and my barrage of questions about the language. Because of his love and talent of singing, when the brigades came to Baxter, he learned many of the songs in English, thus expanding his vocabulary.

their patients were misconceived, at least in this context. I had been of the opinion that such work was for the vain and the rich. For me it had always appeared to be a surgery of the unnecessary. Instead, I learned that a scalpel and stitches could close up wounds of shame and disability and open doors that might not have existed otherwise.

One of our patients was a girl about thirteen years of age. A childhood injury left a scar, which had prevented her from being able to completely extend one of her fingers for almost a decade. A few slits and a redirection of the scar, and the surgeon gave her back the use of her finger. Another man suffered from Dupuytren's syndrome, a progressive shortening of the ligaments of the hand. Likewise, surgery allowed him to improve the mobility of his fingers. Even the aesthetic surgery performed was not entirely in the name of vanity. A man, who I had seen in the clinic the week before, had waited four months for the plastic surgeon to arrive so that he could have two large cysts removed, one between the eyebrows and a large one beside his right ear. Though the cysts were not malignant, I can imagine they had been the cause of many malicious remarks directed toward the man. Though many of us claim that inner beauty is what we seek, we cannot help but gawk at those who have been abnormally formed.

One day right before lunch, the surgeon removed two fungus-infected fingernails from the hands of a woman. Though it was a minor procedure taking only a few minutes, I met this lady on the sidewalk returning from my lunch break and she had an indescribable expression of happiness and gratitude for what we had done for her. It is this that makes medicine worth it for me-being able to give people things that they could

My Favorite Patient

It may seem strange that my favorite patient was not a person that I saw go from a state of severe illness to completely healthy or one that I helped in any physical way. No, my favorite patient was a boy who could not even speak my name and whose long limbs hung from his body in a dangling, jumbled mess of body parts as his dedicated mother brought him to the clinic each week.

Once a week, children in the nutrition program would come to the clinic. Usually, they would go straight to the nutrition supervisor to learn about adequate feeding methods for their children and to receive food. Sometimes I would see them in the pre-clinic room when they were weighed. One seven-year-old child, Robertito, came in weekly to be weighed. A congenital disease (though I never learned exactly which one), left him mentally retarded and unable to walk or stand on his own. Weighing him was a challenge. First, I would place him and his mother on the scale. Then she would hand Robertito to me, and I would direct her to move the marker to the right until the scales were in balance.

“Cuanto pesa?” his mother always asked me.

“25,” I replied.

Every time it was twenty-five pounds. The situation was heartbreaking, but he brought joy to my heart every time I saw his big, slobbering smile come through the door. Robertito and his mother always smiled. “Que la vaya bien Michele,” she told me each time once she learned my name. She was always appreciative as if I had just done a great

To the Ends of the Earth

It was 4:30 in the morning, and there was already a line of people at the clinic waiting to put their names on the list of appointments to be seen later that day. I was amazed that they would already be there and reminded myself to never complain again when the doctor was twenty minutes behind schedule for my appointment in the United States. I hoped they would receive good care in the pre-clinic because I would not be there today to perform my duties. I was needed elsewhere.

For once I had risen before the birds, before the sun, before the time that any human being ought to be awake. I met my other loyal comrades in the bodega where there was a large pile of food and clothing tied up in heavy-duty, clear plastic bags, weighing close to thirty pounds each. I grabbed a bag and walked toward the row of trucks and SUVs parked in a line in front of the clinic like a caravan about to embark on a long journey to the ends of the earth. Our work for the next two days reminded me of something out of a childhood adventure story. Destination: two remote Indian villages, hours from any paved road, complete with an overnight stay.

My home congregation was the sponsor of this effort and accompanying us were a doctor and dentist from the clinic, clinic staff, and a colonel and four of his soldiers. The colonel was a native of one of the villages as was one of the soldiers he had selected for this journey. Coming from such impoverished roots in a place devoid of electricity

oxen. It must have been planting season because in almost every field there were rows of corn, sometimes planted in vertical rows directly on the side of a mountain.

Though it was the rainy season, we were fortunate that the rivers were low. At the ends of the earth there are no concrete bridges. Only shallow, you pray, crossing points from one embankment to the next. I was riding in one of the trucks behind the great Mercedes utility truck. The Mercedes was the reason for our slow progress as it crawled over and around and through the hills and rivers like some great behemoth, laden with bags of food and clothing. The world we saw was like something out of a National Geographic magazine. Swarms of butterflies skirted around the many varieties of flora, and I saw aloe vera plants the size of a bedroom.

Our Role as Physicians

Where the road ended is where our work began. We had arrived at a small four-room clinic that was built in conjunction with the Honduran government and the Catholic Church. A throng of people awaited our services. Dr. Morales and I worked in one small room of the clinic, the colonel worked in another room, and a doctor from my home church worked in yet another room. There were hundreds upon hundreds of patients waiting for us, and Dr. Morales took this as a sign to speed up the process. He seemed to be unmindful of his role as a physician and took on a role like that of a fast food worker, taking symptoms and dispensing out prescriptions as quickly as possible. When he made the decision to bring in two patients at a time, I had to say no. I was angered at the fact

accelerated classes while most of these children were poor, black, and had trouble in their classes. Yet, despite our differences, I began to see a commonality of humanity and trust brought about by the act of service that existed between us. While most people would be quick to stereotype these children as slow learners destined to repeat the cycle of poverty and crime often shared by their predecessors, I learned to see bright, smiling spirits filled with hope for a better future, and with support, determined to overcome any obstacles that might be placed before them. It was through these same lenses that I now saw the patients in front of me.

I refused to continue to help Dr.Morales until we treated the patients as we did those at the clinic. One might wonder how a gringa would have the gall to confront him who was essentially my boss for these two months, someone who I still had to work with for another month. It is simple; though he was my boss in terms of my role at the clinic, ultimately I answered to a greater boss, God, and I knew that He would not approve of this situation. I could not see God allowing me to treat these people as if they were not made by Him just as I had been some years ago. With that in mind, I jeopardized my relations with the clinic for the rest of the summer, but thankfully Dr.Morales conceded, and we continued working until night enveloped us.

Nighttime

One cannot grasp the meaning of night, of darkness, until one is in an area where there is no light. We speak of night back in the United States but what we really mean is

Dawn came, and we enjoyed a hardy breakfast of beans and rice, plantain, and tortillas. I have to say that the all-natural corn tortillas were a delight to my taste buds, accustomed to the over-processed, highly preserved food in the States. As we waited for everyone to get ready, a few of the local villagers came by to sell their baskets, a skill well known in this area. One of these villagers, Chito, was a patient I had seen the day before. The members of my home church quickly bought all of the well-crafted baskets. Wanting to take full advantage of this opportunity, Chito urged us to come to his village a few minutes away because he had more baskets there. Though I regrettably left my camera at the clinic, what I saw in those next few moments was captured in my mind.

Chito's Village

Chito led us up a narrow footpath around and over a hill behind the clinic. We arrived to poverty. I must describe the village in as much detail in order for you to appreciate the circumstances of these people (yes people, not Indians for I feel the term Indian gives us excuse to think of them as being from some other realm and not on an equal plane as ourselves; therefore, it gives us excuse to not treat them as people and gives us excuse to stay in our comfortable homes and let some other adventurous lot help the "savages"). Starving pigs wandered around sniffing at the dirt, their lank frames eager to encounter any newly found treasure in the dirt that might sustain them for a few more days. A few meager pieces of clothing were strung on lines as if in a window display, advertising the latest fashion at a department store. Given to the people by my

their excrement and leaving to their respective niche in the home of the host. To add insult to injury, in the excrement exists a parasite that lives in the cells of the host, causing a chronic disease that will manifest in the symptoms of an enlarged esophagus, stomach, or heart almost a decade after initial infection. There is no cure for Chaga's, only prevention. That is why tin roofs are probably the most important part of the village.

Chito took us to his house, one of the many woven poled, covered in clay, tiled roof structures, where he proudly displayed his family and his handiwork. Inside the house I could tell that it was dark; no sunlight shone in for there was no means for light to enter. An array of basket making supplies lay in the center of the one-room structure, and his family surrounded those. I was the negotiator for the selling of baskets. As he proudly displayed baskets of green and white woven reed, he stated the price of each size, and I in turn quoted it to the few members of my group who had made the journey. During this negotiation, I accidentally mistook one of the baskets for a different size and cheated Chito out of about thirty Lempira, approximately two dollars in American money. Instead of becoming upset, he maintained silence. I felt like the Spanish conquistadors taking advantage of the Indian tribes of Latin America once again, generations later. Once I realized my mistake, I quickly told the member of my group with whom I had arranged the "deal", and we gave Chito the money he was due. Whether there was a lack of clear communication or whether he was surprised that we

the patient, even telling jokes. One of his patients was a woman who was his childhood playmate from forty years ago. He treated his patients with compassion, even making the pharmacy wait an additional ten minutes before closing because he knew two patients were on their way. As I observed the two, I realized that it was the colonel who was truly practicing medicine. Medicine is not about fixing a machine of symptoms with a few small pills; rather, it is about treating the whole person in a manner that examines all aspects that contribute to overall well being and health.

Return to Tegucigalpa

We finished in the early afternoon and drove back to Tegucigalpa. As the smell of exhaust and the sounds of horns replaced the agrarian community of the villagers, I could not help but think that I had yet again traveled to another country. Here were two groups, both Hondurans, yet their lifestyles were completely different. Once again I was reminded of the children I served at the clinic and how I sometimes felt that when I stepped through the doors of the school that I had stepped into another world. It is because of this that we cannot make hasty generalizations about a country or a people. They may bear the same title but a title is a word only and cannot convey a lifestyle, a paradigm, or anything of significance. I cannot say that all Hondurans are poor and illiterate anymore than I can say that all citizens of the United States are prosperous and well educated.

Living in Another Culture

Originally, I was to stay in the apartment with the two single female Baxter students and the female intern from the United States. Due to some other interns coming later in the summer, my residence was shifted into an apartment of a Baxter student's wife and her two children. I must say, I felt apprehensive at the thought of not only living in a foreign country, but also living with another family. I did not know how they would react to having a complete stranger with different customs and from a culture, live with them for two months, nor did I know how I would react to them.

A feeling of awkwardness prevailed the first few days as I became accustomed to the living habits of the family. I thought it strange that they used the oven as a storage container and only cooked on the range. Acclimatized to the warm temperatures of their home country, Nicaragua, they thought it odd that I wanted the window open at night to cool the room. Having nothing in common but our faith and our humanity, or so I thought at the time, I did not spend much time in the apartment the first few days.

Befriending the children was not difficult. Like most children, blind to differences of race and culture, Dimas Miguel and Georgina unconditionally shared their hugs and affection with me. Like Estefani and David, if they saw me walking down the drive in the afternoon, they would halt their play and run toward me with happy cries of, "Meechel, Meechel!" Each morning I was greeted by their half-opened eyes and sleepy smiles and would leave them, heads peeking around the half-opened door telling me,

tell that she enjoyed it and I told her about my musical abilities. That moment of connection melted away some of the awkwardness between us.

The next night, we showed each other photos of our families and our lives. The weeks passed and my relationship with Ana and the children improved. As I learned more Spanish, I learned more about the lives of this family. At night, Ana and I would often sit on the couch and swap stories about life in Nicaragua or the United States, sometimes with Ana adding in motherly advice about being careful around all the young single Baxterianos. Before I had perceived that we had little in common, but I realized that as Christian women we shared many of the same aspirations and worries about life.

When Ana's husband Diego returned from his apprenticeship in Panama two weeks before I returned to the United States, I felt almost as if it were my dad returning instead of someone I had never met. Although when I moved in, I originally felt like a stranger, by this time I almost felt a part of the Lopez family. We had shared in each other's life for the past six weeks, and that experience forged a bond between the three of us. Perhaps through Ana's stories of Diego and pictures or perhaps because I had grown more accustomed to the culture, the initial awkwardness I experienced upon meeting Ana and the children, was not present when I met Diego. He showed the family and me pictures of his experiences in Panama and how like me, though he knew the language, he had to acquaint himself with the culture and way of life there.

With less than a week before my departure, I told the Lopez family that I wanted to take them out to eat; it was the least I could do for the hospitality they had shown me

different congregation with the students who were assigned to that congregation. The first Sunday I went with the intern from the University of Tennessee and two of the Baxter students to their assigned church for services. Going to church did not just mean jumping in a car for a few minutes. It meant taking a forty-five minute bus ride from Baxter to an intersection, walking up the embankment to the next bus stop and waiting in the sun until the next bus arrived, and then walking down a steep, muddy set of stairs to the church building. Like at the church near Baxter, I was greeted according to custom. Not being a person typically very demonstrative with my affections, at first I was uncomfortable with the customs of greeting, but by the end of my trip, I hugged and greeted fellow Christians just like the other members of the church.

The building was a small one-room structure built on the side of the hill. Two large, open windows behind the pulpit provided adequate circulation and a nice view of the shack-covered hills of the city. The service was good, and afterwards the other intern and I were invited with the Baxter students to a member of the church's house for lunch. The invitation meant a lot to me because I know how difficult it must have been to provide food for four more people than usual.

We spent the afternoon at the home, conversing and watching American cartoons translated into Spanish on TV and participating in a devotional for the youth of the church. The whole day made me think of how some of us that call ourselves Christians complain because church means we sacrifice sleeping in an extra hour and means sacrificing a few hours each Sunday, yet some of these people take an hour of travel time

Los Baxterianos

I knew that I would be living in the confines of Baxter and with the students, but I never realized the impact that their lives would have on mine. When I arrived at Baxter I was greeted in the cafeteria by fifty nameless faces, all dressed alike in their uniforms of navy pants, pressed white shirts, and crimson ties, and different from me in many respects. When I left, I would say goodbye to fifty of my friends, all with unique personalities and talents, and like me in our shared desire to serve and our love for God.

Never have I met a group of young men with such a strong desire to learn about God, grow in their faith, and to use their talents to share God's love with others. Like myself, many of these students left behind friends and family in the name of serving God, and many were in a strange culture. I suppose I had always assumed that all Latin American countries were alike, but what I learned was that, though they may share the same language, each country has a set of customs and culture of its own. Being a university student who had also left my family in pursuit of an education, I empathized with the students. I understood the difficulties they faced in being with people of different backgrounds, different ethnicities, and different cultures.

It was interesting to learn why these students felt called to come to Baxter. Some of the students did not even know how they would be able to come to Baxter, not even

also call for a high degree of responsibility. People bare their very souls to us. They have to trust us, to trust us with their very lives. Our patients trust us to take this divulged brokenness, and with gentleness and respect, they trust us to heal them, to make them better in some way that is worth the risk of revealing their deepest hurt and pain. Yes, though we approach it with different methods, focusing on different facets of the person, our calling is essentially the same.

These men became my mentors, not only with helping me learn the language, but also spiritually, challenging me to grow in my faith through thought-provoking discussions and by their example. Often, I would find myself after supper perched on one of the stone flights of stairs or ledges near the computer lab, involved in deep conversation with these students. Frequently, I was asked the question, “Why did you want to come here?” It made me stop and think about my purpose for being here.

Like my peers at the university, they enjoyed having fun and taking a break from their studies. It became a Friday night routine to go to the local mall, get coffee, and just sit around and talk. If we were feeling rich, we might spend a few Lempiras and buy tokens to play air hockey in the local arcade. As I shared in their lives, the physical differences between us became less pronounced as the commonality of our humanness and Christianity manifested itself.

The students inspired me through their example. Most of my guy friends at home could not tell me what classes they would take next semester, much less what they would do with their lives once they graduated. On the other hand, many of these young men

capacity of that purpose. Some deny their allotted purpose, trying to turn their flowerpots into milk jugs. Others, sadly, journey through life without ever considering their purpose, merely content with mediocrity. In pondering this and realizing that it was when I was here in Honduras that I felt truly content because of the meaningfulness it gave me through service, I had an epiphany. If these students were willing to sacrifice everything to go serve for a period of time in a foreign country, why should I not consider the same possibility? I knew God had blessed me with many talents, and I envisioned serving as a medical missionary in Latin America as an aggregation of these talents. Upon this, I prayed that if God wanted me to serve Him in this way, that He would open doors for me to do so. It was definitely a night of stepping out of my comfort zone for I was laying my whole life out on the line to God, telling him, "Here am I. Send Me!"

Marcos, had trouble remembering my name at first, but by the end of the trip would become one of my closest friends.

Facilitation

Diligently, I prepared for my part of the women's seminar and saw unexpected talents being put to use. The semester before at the university, I had co-led a Bible study on the characteristics of a Godly woman according to Proverbs 31:10-31. Based on my knowledge from this study, I wrote a short lesson in my simple Spanish to present to the women. I labored over my efforts, calling on the help of the students for grammar and content analysis. During this time, I also procured supplies for the children's program. My home church left the day before we were to travel to San Pedro Sula. In their work in Honduras, they had prepared bags of crayons, cross necklaces, small stuffed animals, and puppets made from green-dyed socks, pipe cleaners, and glue-on eyes to give away at the children's hospital. I knew that they had excess bags that needed to be given away, so I asked them if I could take the extras with me on the campaign. They willingly agreed, not wanting to carry the items back to the United States.

Part of service is facilitation, that is, being able to take what is unneeded by one and to give it to him who needs. When speaking with one of the administrators of the clinic, he made the insightful comment to me, "If there were a way to take the 'junk' that America sets on the curb each week for the garbage disposal service and bring it here to Honduras, then we would be amply supplied with what we need."

knowing that this was only a preparation for my final goodbye in a few weeks. I finished packing, limiting my belongings to my smaller suitcase. One of the students made sure to remind me to pack my swimsuit. The group had plans to go to the beach one afternoon since we would only be an hour away from the coast.

We caught a taxi to the bus station, just in time to catch the direct charter to San Pedro Sula. The bus was an old charter, the windows covered by thick curtains that could be opened to let in the breeze or closed to keep out the dust of the highway. I had not visited this part of the country so at times I was like a small school child on their first bus ride, their face glued to the window. The landscape was beautiful. Midway through the trip, we passed by Lake Ochoa, formed by a volcano. When we reached San Pedro Sula, the two-lane highway was replaced by a curbed, four-laned street with modern buildings, semi-trucks, and an occasional factory. I felt like I was in a Carolina coastal town.

A Foreigner

The preacher gave us a ride from the bus station to the outlying neighborhood that would be our home for the next week. Modernity was replaced by rutted, dirt streets, horse-pulled carts, and the small cinder-block houses I had grown accustomed to seeing in Honduras. The group would be living in the half-finished day care across the street from the church. There were three rooms that had been equipped with twin beds and a line of metal stalls and showers surrounding the open common area. Someone had been thoughtful and brought us a TV and two rotating fans. The compound housed an adjacent

We woke the next morning to a breakfast of cornflakes with warm milk and bananas. With the exception of the elevated temperature of the milk and the soggiess of the flakes that ensued, I could almost imagine myself eating breakfast in my kitchen at home. After dressing for church, we walked across the street to the church for service. The white-painted, wooden slatted pews were almost completely full, and the four fans hung on the ceiling produced a pleasant breeze throughout the building. One of the student leaders, Marcos, preached the sermon and the other students helped lead singing and taught the congregation new songs.

That afternoon, the students split into groups to go visit members of the church who had not attended services in some time. I could have stayed at the compound, but I wanted to be of some use on this trip so I decided to go. Marcos, a man from the church, and I turned right out of the daycare and walked about three blocks down the street, turning down another street and walking another block. The first family we visited was relaxing in their home, the husband in a hammock and the wife sitting outside in a chair. We joined them outside, and Marcos and the man from the church began to talk to them. After explaining that I was from the United States, Marcos offered me the opportunity to speak to the wife. I conveyed to her in my broken Spanish that like her, I had also experienced her same feelings of discouragement, and sometimes I did not want to serve. However, it was during those times that I tried to serve only myself is when I felt even more discouraged. The effort in trying to avoid the effort of worship and serving God, brought about less satisfaction and results than simply worshipping and serving Him.

woman, where can she be found? She is more valuable than precious stones!” I told her that she was valuable simply for being a woman of God. Slowly and searching for words in my limited vocabulary, I told her that I understood what it meant to live as a Christian and as a woman and the difficulties of being both. Tears began to stream down her face, and my eyes were moistened with emotion as well. The four of us sang and prayed. As we left, I embraced the woman and told her, “God bless you.” I never thought that my gift of womanhood would be used to help another. By being able to relate through the commonality of gender, I was able to communicate with this lady in a way that the two men with me could never have accomplished.

Evening Activities

At nighttime, some of the students and I would emerge from the proximity of the fans inside to the cooler night air for a round of basketball or to sit under the covered breezeway, chatting about life’s events and learning about the humanity of each one of us. I learned of the love the students possessed for their families. I learned of the struggles some of them had faced in their lives and how their suffering better equipped them to help others. Sometimes, it is only through suffering that our talents can be refined in such a way to meet certain needs. It is only when we have experienced the same needs of the one that we serve that we can know exactly how to apply our talents to meet their needs. Our vessels are cracked by life’s hardships in order that we may understand the cracks in others’ vessels. In our sufferings sometimes we are completely

dreaded the coldness of the water, and other times it was a welcome relief from the sweat-producing heat. Though it was not as convenient as a regular shower with running water (try washing long hair pouring small bowls of cold water), throughout our stay, I did not complain. The other students seemed to think nothing of it, and I imagined that some of them had grown up accustomed to these very conditions.

Located in the confines of the playground was a pila (pronounced “pee-lah”) for washing our clothes. Though Baxter had the luxury of washing machines, this was the standard appliance for cleaning laundry in Honduras. It was a concrete structure that consisted of a cistern of water joined to a flat concrete washboard. Clothes were washed by drawing water from the cistern using the same type plastic bowl used for bathing, placing soap on the garment, and scrubbing it vigorously across the washboard. Like at Baxter, clothes were hung outside to dry. Whoever made that commercial about the lady driving miles so she could have that “line-dried” smell for her laundry must have never actually touched line-dried laundry. You can’t exactly put fabric softener sheets on the line.

On one of the days when I needed to wash some of my clothes, the ladies that prepared our meals told me that the water in the pila was dirty and unsuitable for washing clothes. Instead of leaving to my own devices to procure a means of washing my clothes, one of the ladies told me to follow her. We walked to the end of the street and up four steep, narrow stone steps to her small house. Clothes hung on the line around the tiny dirt yard and two children shyly peeked from behind the entrance to the house. Adjacent

different lives we were all united in our purpose for being here and our service to God. Through my service here I began to see the lines of gender, nationality, and any other demographic differences blurred in the bond that was being formed between us. After devotional, one of the students suffered from an upset stomach and another from a sore throat, so Marcos and I walked to the bus stop and rode into town to buy medication for the two. After coming back and treating their sore throats and stomachaches, we ate lunch.

That afternoon, I went with one of the students and a youth from the church, about fifteen years old, to revisit people they had spoken with on Sunday. The day was hot, and the sun shone brightly on us as we joked and chatted, walking along the dusty, quiet streets of the neighborhood. The afternoon was waning as we left the last house. By this time, I was not feeling well. We stopped at a small in-house store on our way back to the daycare so I could buy a bag of coke. The man poured the contents of the glass bottle into a plastic bag and inserted a straw, tying a knot to secure the straw. I placed the bag on my forehead, thinking that I had been in the heat too long and just needed to cool down. When we arrived back at the daycare, I went to my room and placed a fan at the end of my bed. I decided to rest for a few moments, hoping that I would feel better in time to go with Julieta to present our seminar to the women that night. At 6pm one of the students knocked on the door, "Michel, do you want to eat supper with us?"

"No, thanks," I answered him, "I'm not feeling well." Instead of getting better, I was feeling worse. None of my efforts relieved the nauseous, feverish feeling that had

here in this suburb none were to be found. Unsuccessful in finding a doctor, we went to a pharmacy. I explained my symptoms to the pharmacist. He diagnosed me with parasites and sold me medicine as well as medicines for nausea and vomiting. Had my senses not been clouded from sickness, I would have realized that my symptoms were not congruent with the symptoms of the parasite-infested patients in the mountain village or of those in the city. I had ample money to pay for the medications, but the group that had brought me insisted on paying. We then drove to another pharmacy to purchase *suero*, a rehydration solution. Once again, I was told not to worry about paying, it was covered.

A fifteen-minute drive brought us back to the church and daycare. I could not hold it in any longer. I went to a grassy patch by the back entrance to the church and vomited. Some of the students helped me walk back inside the daycare. Marcos told me that he wanted me to sleep in the room where he and another student had been sleeping. The breeze was more prolific in that room, making it more comfortable. They moved one of the two fans into my room and moved their belongings into the room of some of the other students. I asked them where they would sleep. He told me that they were going to put two mattresses on the concrete floor in the open area of the daycare and sleep there along with the two lanky guard dogs that prowled the grounds.

“If you need anything, don’t hesitate to wake us,” he told me.

I took the medications given me and drank some of the *suero*, its sickly sweet syrup coating my throat and disguising the taste of the pills. I prayed that the worst was

As I lay in bed, staring at the pale yellow walls painted with a white and powder blue checked border halfway up the wall, I thought about my time spent here in Honduras and about service. I reflected upon those who had provided the monetary means for me to be here. Though they could not physically be present to offer their talents, they used their talent of earning money to provide the means so that I could serve. Their service of donating of a few dollars might be considered as a drop in the bucket, but this drop spreads, its effects rippling outward into other acts of service which in turn continue to spread until the whole bucket is effect by the drop of one person's generosity.

The next morning I felt better and managed to eat part of a bowl of mushy cornflakes. I rested for most of the morning and was finally able to take a shower, my first in two days. In preparation for the beginning of nightly services that day, someone had left some red paper on a table. I decided to cut it into strips and write Philippians 1:3 and "Thanks for Everything" on the papers to give to the students. I could not help but be somewhat in awe of how though I had been a stranger only a few days before, how much they had served me and cared for me during these past few days of my illness.

Some of the ladies of the congregation used their talents of housekeeping in preparing our meals and cleaning the daycare. The cooks that night had prepared me a special meal because of my illness, and I managed to eat a few pieces of toast and some fruit. I got ready for church, excited that I was actually going to be able to participate. We walked across the street to the church building and sat in the pews. A few minutes later, my nauseous, feverish feeling returned, so I had to leave and return to my pale

hear a story from the Bible. “Sí, sí!” they replied with enthusiasm. Daniel wanted to hear the story of his namesake, so we opened to the book of Daniel, and read the story of the faithful prophet and his rescue from the lions’ den. Then they wanted to hear the story of Jonah and the big fish. After that, we read the story of Deborah. I was surprised at their knowledge of Bible stories and greatly encouraged by this and their enthusiasm to learn.

That night, the Ramirez family and Marcos knocked on my door. “Come in,” I told them. They had come not only to check on my health, but to pray for me. Marcos told me that we would try to find another doctor in the morning and if we couldn’t, then he would ride the bus with me back to Tegucigalpa with me so that I could be seen at the clinic. Only a few days before, these people were almost strangers to me, and now their concern for me was equal to that displayed to me by my closest friends back home.

The next day, July 4th, began with a bowl of imported German cornflakes. Still not feeling well, Marcos, Raquel the preacher’s daughter who spoke English, and I went to San Pedro Sula in search of a legitimate doctor. Fortunately we found one. We walked into a nicely decorated building where the names of forty doctors hung on the wall with their respective specialties. No appointment was necessary, and I felt as if I were in some ice cream shop where today I could have a little of number twenty-six and tomorrow I could see number fifteen. I wisely chose an internist. After a brief examination, he told me that an interaction between my anti-malarial medicine and the parasite medicine I had been taking for non-existent parasites was the cause of my

who four days earlier, we had visited with to study the Bible. I remembered the inexpressible look of joy on her face on Saturday night when she became my sister in Christ. As I thought about the conditions in which many of these women and children lived and reflected on the great poverty from which many came, I considered how terrifying it would be to not know if I could support myself and my family to the next month. Then I realized that they did not have that worry --God takes care of his people wherever they are. As the body of Christ, each member works to help the other member. Sometimes it is my duty to serve others to help them continue in life. Other times, like throughout much of the past week, others had served me, and I realized this is what Christianity is all about, truly loving your neighbor as yourself. Bertha von Suttner once stated, "After the verb 'to Love,' 'to Help' is the most beautiful verb in the world." My love for my neighbors here, my fellow Christians, was expressed through my service to them and reciprocated through their service to me.

Tomás preached the night before from Acts 2:44-47 about the first Christians:

"All the believers were together and had everything in common...They gave to anyone as he had need . Every day they continued to meet together...They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts...And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

My experience here in San Pedro Sula was like that expressed of the first Christians. For over a week, we had met together, ate together, met each other's

First Aid

Throughout my trip, in reflecting on my talents and the characteristics and cracks in my vessel, my thoughts continually turned to my service at the inner-city school clinic. The clinic was a breeding ground for my understanding of true service. Since my first trip to Honduras, my heart had been pricked each subsequent trip to serve and incorporate service as a part of my life. I had returned to the University of Tennessee in the fall of 2001, a month after spending ten days in Honduras. I wanted to practice serving in Knoxville in the same way that I had experienced in Honduras, finding a way to exercise what talents I possessed to benefit others. I had enrolled in a Service Learning course as part of my course requirements for the Honors Program.

Since I had interest in medicine, my professor placed me with a full-time school nurse at a local inner-city school. Later, after being certified through the American Red Cross to be a volunteer school nurse, I transferred my service to another inner-city school to establish a clinic where a registered nurse was only present one day each week. Most schools in Knoxville have a registered nurse one day a week with parents serving in the clinic as volunteer Red Cross school nurses the other days. Since there is a lack of parental support at this inner-city school, I had to find support elsewhere. I recruited my peers at the university, knowing that many of them, like me, wanted to serve in the community but did not have an outlet to do so. When it became evident that because of

the inner-city school, the people of their community would have little access to healthcare. I thought of Luke 6:9 that spoke of the disciples' call to not only preach but to heal. Then, I realized that I could use the skills acquired from training students to serve in the inner-city school clinic to teach the students at Baxter simple first aid that might help save a life. Though I was somewhat fearful to do so, I knew that I must teach the class in Spanish and needed to acquire booklets in Spanish, too. I spoke with the president's wife, the coordinator of the women's program for the Baxter wives. She like the idea and it was agreed that if I could get the materials needed, then I could teach the class. Not knowing the quantity of materials needed or how I would procure them and ship them here, we decided to offer the class only to the women one morning during my last week here.

I knew the American Red Cross in Knoxville had teaching materials and booklets available in Spanish. I emailed my father and asked him to contact the Red Cross there and see if they would loan me materials to instruct a class. My father called them, and they referred him to the Nashville chapter who then told him that the first aid booklets were available at a cost of \$1.60 each and instructional cards on splinting fractures and bandaging were also available at a cost of \$2.00. I had some unused funds appropriated for this trip so buying the amount of books needed would not be an issue; however, when I learned it would cost almost one hundred dollars to ship the supplies and the delay of two to three weeks it would take for them to arrive, I was discouraged. Being a person that tries even harder when it seems like the task is impossible, I began to brainstorm. I

many of the ideas conveyed in complete sentences so I decided to base my discourse from those and to also have the students learn by reading the points to other students.

When I thought I had satisfactorily prepared everything, I then realized that I needed materials to demonstrate and practice the methods of bandaging, splinting, and removal of disposable gloves. These supplies had always been available for my classes in Knoxville because people who volunteered their time at the American Red Cross Chapter House prepared packages of roller gauze and gloves for bandaging and glove removal and strips of cloth and folded magazines for splinting. Here in Honduras, there was no such place that packaged neat little bags of supplies for teaching first aid nor was there a one-stop shopping center where I could buy anything I might possibly need for the class. I was on my own to find the necessary resources. I remembered that throughout the years, the clinic had built up a storehouse of supplies sent by the brigades. I obtained permission to use some packets of roller gauze, gauze pads, and a box of gloves for the bandaging and glove removal exercise, but I was still clueless as to where I would find cloth and magazines necessary to demonstrate splinting.

Determined, I ascended the stone stairs to the president's wife's office and knocked on her door. When I told her what I needed, she informed me that one of the brigades that stayed at Baxter had recently sent two boxes full of scraps of cloth for the women to use for sewing or crafts projects. I was welcome to whatever I could find in the boxes. With eagerness, I ran down the stairs and began searching through the boxes for materials. I came up with an assortment of brightly patterned strips for tying the

the tables and chairs for the class. Carefully sorting out the necessary books and demonstration kits and placing the Spanish first aid book and my notes on the podium, I was ready to teach. I began the class by explaining my purpose for teaching them and talking about general health. It might seem odd to begin a first aid class with a segment on health and hygiene, but due to my service in the clinic, I realized that many illnesses that brought people to the clinic, including some of the Baxter students and their families, could be prevented by simple health measures. I stressed the importance of hand washing and the prevention of germs. The rest of the class went smoothly as the women practiced bandaging imaginary wounds on each other and removing disposable gloves. At the end of the lesson, I had a question and answer session to review the basic concepts they had learned. They seemed to enjoy learning the skills, and it was an encouragement to me to know that they could then take these new skills and help someone else.

A few days later, I taught an optional class to about fifteen of the male students. I could tell that one of the students had had some experience with first aid because he further explained a concept when I could not find the exact words. With plenty of time, I was able to cover everything I had planned to teach. When teaching the section on burns, the students became my teachers. Though modern in many aspects, the students showed me that much of their society still has traces of indigenous practices. Agreeing with what I said in the treatment of burns about the application of cool water and not putting anything on them except a dressing, they informed me that many of the people of Honduras thought it best to apply butter, ointments of various types, or even kerosene to

A Weekend Retreat

The last weekend I was in Honduras, two of the students, Mateo and José, invited a couple from Alabama staying at Baxter to teach English and myself to accompany them to their assigned church three hours away. We met on the steps outside the cafeteria around 5:30am, and from there caught a taxi to the bus station. Around ten o'clock that morning after a three hour bus ride, we arrived at the little town. It was a small agrarian town nestled in a beautiful valley surrounded by mountains. The sky exhibited the clarity of a priceless blue diamond, and the sun shone on us with unrelenting heat. The bus let us off at the end of a broad dusty road. Mateo and José started walking and motioned the rest of us to follow. We walked down the road and turned off onto another dirt path. I had been warned of the plethora of burros in this town and soon a mother and her baby greeted us from their stake near a small house. A mile or so from the bus stop, we reached the house of the preacher. It was a small cinder block house with a breezeway in the center to promote airflow. The preacher was outside when we arrived, applying the finishing touches to a truck seat he recently repaired. During the week, the preacher used his sewing machine and hands to stitch together and repair upholstery; on the weekends, he used those same hands and God's Word to help stitch together and repair the wounded souls of the church members.

Everyone who serves needs a moment to take themselves out of service to have an opportunity for renewal and enjoyment and to simply reflect on life and their service.

Being imperfect humans, we cannot continually keep emptying ourselves for the betterment of others without taking time to refill ourselves. If we do not spend time in renewal of ourselves, we risk acquiring the “un-paid job” mentality and becoming free laborers rather than servers.

When the brigades came to the clinic, the doctors and staff, including me, worked six days a week. After a few weeks of this schedule, I began to have the un-paid job mentality about my service and knew that I needed to take some time away from the clinic, so one afternoon, Joey and me took a bus ride downtown to the National Gallery of Art.

Once an old monastery, the building had been transformed into a collection of galleries displaying many eras of art of Honduras from the Maya civilization to the present. Entering one of the more modern galleries, Joey and I both stopped and stared at one painting in particular. Entitled, “La Explosión” it was truly an explosion of bright, vivid colors and subdued, earth tones suggesting the encounter of a modern city skyline with an agrarian heritage. We sat down on a thoughtfully placed bench and just soaked in the colors, shapes, and culture of Honduras. The artist had managed to capture the ever-present juxtaposition of modernity alongside tradition and heritage. Here we were sitting among fine pieces of art in a historic building that surrounded a courtyard of fragrant plants while just outside, street vendors and children hawked small portraits and

bond of humanity and our shared purposed in life. She seemed satisfied with my answer, and the game moved to the next person.

That night we ate at a local restaurant. Dinner was good and greasy, giving us energy to make the long walk back to the preacher's house. It was late, and the sky's velvety blackness was punctured by millions of tiny stars, pinpoints of brightness lighting our way. As I grasped the small hands of Dilia and German, I wondered if these stars were the same that I saw in the United States when afforded the opportunity to view them away from the city lights. I found the clear, lighted sky a reflection of my time spent here in Honduras. It had been a time cleared of the daily worries of a fast-paced, overscheduled life I was accustomed to leading. Here I had found time to clear my mind and to stop and think about what my seventy or so years of life meant. Each incident experienced here was like one of the stars, a small illumination shining light on the overall purpose of my life and call to service.

I awoke the next morning to Mateo studying over his notes for the sermon he was to preach later that morning. After a hearty bowl of oatmeal, the preacher's family and the five of us walked to the church. About twenty-five people occupied the three pews and odd collection of plastic chairs. After José led the congregation in singing, Mateo began his sermon with an account of three trees. Each tree had aspirations of either being a ship, a treasure chest, or the tallest tree in the forest. One day, a man went to the forest and chopped the trees down. The first tree did not become the mighty ship to sail on the ocean. It became a small fishing boat that sailed the Sea of Galilee. Likewise, the second

at a hotel located within a few miles of the church where we had based our medical and dental efforts. The day we arrived we met another religious group from the United States that had just checked out of the hotel and were planning to travel back to Tegucigalpa and fly home. The conversation naturally turned to their purpose for being here, and they told us about how they had worked long and hard catching wild chickens that roamed the countryside and giving them to the Hondurans so they would have food. Though their intentions were good, their efforts were useless. You see, chickens in Honduras are not kept in coops or fenced in yards. Instead, they roam around the houses and surrounding country, pecking the barren ground and surviving on whatever they can find. This group thought they were helping but in all probability, they were stealing some poor family's chickens and giving them to a complete stranger. Had the group taken the time to communicate with the people and learned the culture, they would have realized that it would have been better to distribute bags of food to each household, perhaps including a little feed for the chickens.

When serving, the recipient of the service must be able to communicate the need and the server must be able to relate to the recipient and understand the need. As I continued to serve, I learned that my biggest obstacle to effective service was my inability to communicate with those I served. At first, my timidity in attempting to speak the language deterred me from speaking all but the most basic of sentences. As I lived there and heard the students' attempt to speak English to me, always with mistakes, I began to understand that it was more of my attempt to communicate that made a

In a well-known poem about success it is stated that, “To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition... This is to have succeeded.” If a person makes a difference in the world or achieves this definition of success and their efforts are not appreciated, are they unsuccessful? Is their life lived for nothing? And if they do make a difference and do succeed, it still has no ultimate value to them for in the end for death still comes, something from which neither the most successful person nor the most unsuccessful can escape. And for the poor, misguided person who thinks that happiness is the ultimate goal in life, he still dies. Then is he happy? In the end, death is the final standard to which we measure our lives.

The remaining few people interviewed had a different approach to life. They realized that what really gave one purpose in life (pardon me if I am “stepping on toes” so to speak, but it is the basis of my argument) is to serve and not just service of any sort. Their answer was that the purpose of life is to serve God. It is by fixing this goal as the crux of one’s paradigm that life takes on real meaning. Why not just service of any type for anything? (I am not saying that non-Christian organizations should cease to do good works. I cannot deny the benefits that come from such service nor the countless numbers aided by such organizations, but this is an argument beyond the scope of this work). The answer is the same as the previous answer given for he who achieved success and made a difference in the world.

By having the goal of serving God, one has a purpose and a service that extends beyond life, an outcome that surpasses the limitations of life for the outcome of service is

exhibit these components, service is recognizing a need, recognizing your talents to meet that need, and then meeting the need.

How many countless television promotions ask for your donations for a worthy cause with the attached promise of sending you a book or the placing of your name on some paper or plaque for all to see in exchange? We pat ourselves on the back, believing we have sacrificed by giving our money to a good cause, but we fail to adopt the attitude of a servant. Being a servant requires a selfless focus; serving is not gratifying the self. Service is not done for the purpose of achieving a trophy or the accolades of many. The rewards of service come from the joy of simply serving and therefore, living a life filled with purpose. It involves looking inward at oneself only to see what can be given outwardly to meet the need of the one being served. Service is not a chance act done in the name of kindness when one feels like it, but it is an attitude that extends past personal whims and fickle traits to consistently offer talents to fulfill the needs of others.

Too often we think that we have too little to give to others when in reality we are overflowing with gifts. We are like two boys I saw in a southern city in Honduras. My church's brigade had finished a meal of fried chicken, coke, and fries at a local restaurant. Not wanting to waste any of the food knowing that many people in that area suffered from hunger and malnutrition, we looked around outside the restaurant to find someone to take our leftovers. Two small boys around the age of eight or nine approached us, their clothes and bronzed skinny legs dirty from the dust of the street. Between them they carried a large, blue plastic bucket. Our group was large, and soon the boys' bucket

vessel and buried it. Like the first two men, when we invest our talents through acts of service, we find ourselves with more than we originally had. In serving, we discover new talents or means of utilizing old talents in new ways. Every time we serve, we inevitably gain something whether it is the discovery of a new talent, a different perspective or just the appreciation of seeing a life affected by the opportunity to serve. Let us not be like the two boys who hoarded their chicken for the good of none or like the servant who was afraid to invest his talents.

longer did I feel like a foreigner. Through our common love for God displayed by our acts of service, the barriers of language, of race, of nationality, or of any type had vanished and had been replaced with the image that we were simply human beings united in purpose.

After eating breakfast, my last meal at Baxter, I walked to the clinic for morning devotional. The morning seemed like any other, with a multitude of people waiting for the clinic to open for the day. My experience serving at the clinic had been somewhat different than expected, my patients teaching me more than anything I learned from the resident or visiting doctors. Though I did not learn as much academic medicine as I had anticipated, I gained valuable insight into patient communication and treatment, something that is not taught in the classroom. At devotional that morning, the assistant director announced that today was my last day. When everyone from Dr. Morales to Josefina sincerely thanked me for my assistance, I was somewhat taken aback. I did not feel as if I had served in some great manner. On the contrary, I felt as if I had gained from their efforts more than I had given. That is how service works; no matter how much you try to give yourself away and your talents, you inevitably gain back more than you gave away. Without the help of a translator, I told everyone at the clinic how much they meant to me, how grateful I was to have this opportunity to serve, and how each of them had impacted my life. I said my final goodbyes and returned to Baxter.

I was blessed with the opportunity to attend the daily devotional at Baxter. Since a brigade was leaving that day, the students had prepared a special choral program. Their

experience it yourself; you must serve in order to understand service. So go and serve and think about your purpose for serving. In doing so, I hope that you will find your life richly blessed with a wealth of talents to fulfill your purpose in life.

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