

Spreading Faith

My daily life was completely rewritten, top to bottom, during the 2 weeks when I was volunteering for the Union Rescue Mission Program. Having come on a volunteer service trip, with my friends from the Global Outreach Christian Club at my school, Union Rescue Mission exposed me to the brutal reality of the differences between my childhood of myself and that of other children. As long as my 10th-grade self was concerned, here in the outskirts of Skid Row LA, my daily life included tasks such as waking up at 5 am, coordinating acts of community service, and preparing 2,000+ meals each week for the homeless. Quite clearly, this stands in stark contrast with your typical bowl of cereal at 7 am, or your 8 to 3 day at school. The little things I took for granted or maybe even complained about seemed minuscule when I faced the eye-opening circumstances of the less privileged areas. The global issues of poverty drilled their presence into my consciousness until I truly realized my privilege and gratefulness for God blessing me in my daily life.

I didn't have to be an expert analyst in order to realize that the socioeconomic circumstances of these people were destitute in comparison to the life I knew. House walls consisted of nylon tents and unwashed fabric, which stained my senses with a disagreeable layer of odor, an annoyance that was transitory, but intolerable nonetheless. Eroded stones and overgrown tree roots were speckled across the roads, many of which upset my privileged stomach during countless rough drives.

There was, though, one universally appreciable aspect of this trip - charity. Looking back at my diary entries from Skid Row, I smile fondly as I view these lines I

wrote: *The work we do is difficult, devoting our time and resources... but through this volunteering, I want to show our unconditional love to people in need.*

In the Bible, the *unconditional* love of Jesus can be observed countless times. And yet, the prerequisites for the faith were very much *conditional*. The expectations of society for people to come to church, offer tithe, etc. to justify their faith, were all conditional. I couldn't understand how even the most faithful believers, if without stable housing or income, could afford to sacrifice time and money towards fulfilling these conditions, when their personal concerns would've overtaken place of priority. What did Christ's "unconditional" love even stand for, if it was defined primarily by its requisites? Why was everyone expected to check off these "conditions" in order to RSVP for their seating in heaven? When I spoke out although my actions were impetuous in nature, I knew I wholeheartedly believed in what I was standing up for. This treatment was separate from the example that we as Christians look up to.

The only obstacle moving forward would now be to gather as much support as I could for the sake of the Christians chained by poverty. During the rest of those 2 weeks, God developed my daily schedule beyond simply going with the flow. I conversed with the clubmates that were with me- and eventually, we agreed that the authorities' treatment of believers in SR was unjust. This meant that making an official discussion was now a real possibility! I led my friends and me to mention these realizations in our reflection speeches at every sermon and continued to deliver food and water to the 'tenants' of Skid Row. My routine evolved, and people I once considered clubmates and acquaintances became like my family. I realized through this new day-to-day schedule

that God was pushing me to speak out about things I'd never even thought about before.

He was pushing me to take this new family of mine and learn to speak out.

Through multiple altercations, I pointed out how the religious community's expectations went against our very purpose of going on the mission: to lend a hand to those in need. Just like how we struggled to imagine the daily life of these people living in completely opposite circumstances, they were only able to *dream* of what we are fortunate enough to have. The irony was that a club that wanted to lead like Christ imposed its will by *force* rather than *love*. A clash between those two ideals had never been sparked in the past, due to the complaisance of our religious community's privileged expectations. But it was essential to bring about the change that these people desperately needed.

Despite the initial struggles, God developed my daily routine so that I was able to help establish a balanced field between the two major ideals of forceful evangelism and loving charity. This experience did reveal the hostilities between the visions of the elderly authorities and the daring youth; however, it showed how the characteristics of my mind revealed themselves within my efforts. With my new friends, I found a new sense of gratitude in my daily life. A trait that God sent me in order to learn about devotion, unconditional love, persistence, dedication, and most importantly, the pursuit of charity.