

This was my first missions trip that I have ever gone on so I had no idea of what to expect going in. I knew the people we were going to be helping were going to be poor, but I didn't know that they would be as poor as they were. Jumping back, when we arrived in San Diego it was a nice, cool Californian night and as we (our team) sat at the airport no one really had any idea of what was going on. We just hoped our missionary leaders would show up to pick us up. They eventually did and so we packed our bags in the trailer and hopped in the vans that would carry us across the coast of Baja California through the slums of Tijuana, through tall mountains and along beautiful sea shore.

About 2 and a half hours later when we finally arrived in Ensenada, we turned off the road onto a dirt path that we followed up a hill. This wasn't your ordinary hill, this was a rocky, bumpy, dirt hill. We climbed those hills, as bumpy and rocky as they were, all the way up to where our missionary friends lived. After we unloaded the trailer, we took our bags up 12 rock stairs to a little house where our team stayed. There were two small rooms for the boys on the 1st floor and one big room for the girls upstairs. Along with the boys rooms on the first floor, there was also a couch, a mirror, a water cooler and a small table. That night we met with our missionary leaders, who I hope you have found out are different from our team leaders who traveled with us from Northwestern, and they revealed to us the structure of the week and what we would be doing.

Kathy, one of our missionary leaders, told the girls about the VBS schedule, activity schedule and what she hoped would happen throughout the week with the kids of their village. Tim, Kathy's husband, told the guys about the construction work we would be completing throughout the week. He told us we would be cementing a floor for a worship center in the village and that we would also be cementing the floor for a family's house in the village. Kathy also told us that we would only be able to shower every other day and that we would be using outhouses for toilets. Now, outhouses I can handle, but only showering every other day was a new thing to me and I don't think I really liked it. But on the other hand I think it was good for the group and I to be able to get away from the everyday luxuries of living in Minnesota and immerse ourselves in the Mexican culture as much as we could. And as the week moved along I observed more and more of this culture everyday. I saw for myself just how little these people have. They live in a shack just about as big as most of our kitchens and they lived off of basically no income. These people own nothing but the clothes on their back and some pots, pans, some silverware, a table and some chairs and the tools that they need to work at whatever job they may or may not have. These people own next to nothing, but yet they are still happy. They still can find joy in the small things. What follows is just one of the stories that blew me away from the week in Ensenada.

A man from the village, Ramon, and his family have been struggling financially for a long time. Neither Ramon or his wife have been able to find work for awhile. But just recently, Tim had given Ramon a project to do and when he was done with the project Tim would pay him for his efforts. Our team has just arrived after Ramon had completed his task and had been paid. This is the kicker, Ramon and his wife felt so blessed to have us come and help Tim and Kathy out that they used the money that Ramon just got paid with and used it to buy food so that they could feed our team lunch one day while we were there. Now doesn't that just make you take a step back and take a look at yourself. It made me wonder if I would do the same, specially if I was having the same financial difficulties as Ramon and his family were having. Could I give up the little money I made and use it not for my sake, not for bettering myself or using it to provide for my family but use it to pay for food to feed total strangers that I will probably never see again in my life? I don't know if I can see myself doing that. It made me realize just how much I have here in Minnesota compared to how little they have in Ensenada. But yet even though they had little material possessions, they were blessed in ways I would of never thought of

if it wasn't for this trip. See material things don't matter to them, they don't find happiness and joy in the tangible things because they don't have material things, they find their hope and joy and happiness in the intangible things. They take pride in their family, in the relationships they form, in helping each other survive, in hosting mission trip teams for lunch, in spending time with the people they love and in their God. Seeing and understanding this helped me to realize just how lucky I am and just how much I have been blessed.

I wish I could have stayed longer to experience more and help out more, but unfortunately we had to leave. Leaving was hard because we all knew that there was so much more that could be done. But we left with the hope that what little we did do during our short stay was helpful and a blessing to the people of the village. Personally this trip was a turning point in my life, it made me appreciate more the intangible things in my life. Through this trip I developed a passion for missions and to reach out to those in need and to those who don't have it as good as I do. Because, I've learned, it's not the material things we take with us on to heaven, it's the relationships, it's the people we have brought to Christ, it's the memories we have shared with those we love, it's the love we have for those who need it most.

Luke