

As a 21st century teenager, my life is full of distractions and tasks. Text messages, facebook notifications, acne, homework, extracurriculars, resenting my parents for no reason- I have a lot to do. What this pilgrimage did was it took us away all of that. It put me in this place where I was surrounded by these people who I love, who I look up to, and gave us a period of time to focus on the spiritual.

I get along with Justin Bruce great. However, if we weren't sojourners together, and never had a class together where we could ~~cheat off each other~~ study together, we probably wouldn't be friends. He plays lacrosse, and I... I don't. (Day:night::lacrosse:whatever Dallas is doing at any given moment.) But, along with Henry, Justin, Aaron and Susana, we all make wonderful friends.

And one afternoon, Justin and I ended up alone, and we started talking about our trip, the things we had been doing, and got to talking about prayer. Justin was saying how he's always felt like "stuff like that" (prayer) was more meaningful when we all do it together.

And Anna and I sort of had this on-going discussion of a spiritual conflict that we were confronted with in Ecuador. There were several people begging in the streets along our journey. As traveler, you're taught to avoid folks who ask for money, because you never know if they'll be dangerous, and as a matter of principle, because they are typically people who make a career of panhandling and target gringo tourists. But shouldn't our principles tell to be as generous as possible, in Jesus' name? How could we read the gospel and pray every day and then ignore people in need because travel blogs say to? So that was the moral dilemma that we wrestled with, and shared thoughts about. Needless to say, we didn't come to any one conclusion, but we really thought about it.

We saw and did so many amazing things: volcanoes, rivers, waterfalls, cathedrals, and those experiences were priceless. But it almost wasn't about that. Ecuador was a beautiful backdrop for this unique moment in spacetime where we could all exist together, spiritually. Without all the crazy distractions of everyday life, it showed us what was really important: Friendship, God, and food.

I am so thankful to everyone in this congregation for their generosity, love and support. It was worth every pie.