

FOCUS Uganda Mission Trip: July 9th-July 31st 2018

Well, I survived Africa and suprisingly, I didn't get Ebola or Malaria. First off, I want to say thank you for your support and your prayers. Without you, this amazing experince would never have been possible, so thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Our team consisted of 3 full time FOCUS missionaries and 9 college-aged students from all over the US. These 11 strangers became like family and I felt so blessed to be around such like-minded people for almost a whole month. We met in Newark and started our 24 plus hour journey until we finally reached Entebbe, Uganda.



Jinja

After landing in Entebbe, we drove 3 hours to a rural area called Jinja. Jinja is located on Lake Victoria and is famous as the headwaters of the Nile. Coming from America to one of the more “laid back” areas of Uganda was definitely a culture shock. The streets were filled with farmers selling their produce, motorcycle mechanics set up under a trees and children running all around. These people have lived together for their entire lives. Everyone there had literally grown up with each other so it made the town of Jinja really feel like a community of friends.



While there, we worked with this organization called Imprint Hope which was founded by an American named Claire Byrne. After Claire got her Masters degree, she went down to Kampala for a year to work with special needs orphans and when she returned to the states, she had a calling to go back to Uganda. Two years ago, 28 year old Claire sold everything that she owned and moved to Jinja to help special needs children. When I first heard this, I thought of Mark 10:21, “Sell what you have... then come, follow me.” She took this bible verse to heart and opened up Imprint Hope. Imprint takes in 5 to 7 mothers with a special needs child for 6 weeks. During these 6 weeks, Claire houses and feeds them while teaching them a variety of different skills that are essential when working with handicaped kids. She teaches the mothers proper nutrition, ways of taking care of the kids as well as physical therapy and just loving the kids. In Uganda, children with special needs are seen as curses and usually, mothers will keep them locked away so that no one will know that their child or family is cursed. Claire is working on breaking this stigma through opening the eyes of the people of Uganda so that they can see what a blessing these kids are. Talk about a modern day saint!

Claire is currently building a new center outside of Jinja to better facilitate the children. Our work included helping her build this new facility. I have never hand mixed so much concrete in my entire life and I hope that I will never have to do anything with concrete ever again. When we weren't at her building site, we would be playing with the kids and just hanging out with them. It

was so hard for me to believe that people down there see these kids as curses. They had the brightest smiles and just being around them gave me such joy because I could feel God working through them to soften my heart so that He could become bigger in my life.

Kampala and Missionaries of the Poor

After about two weeks in Jinja working with Imprint Hope, our team went to the capital city of Kampala. Kampala is a massive city with a population well over a million people. The landscape there is so incredible different than anything I've ever seen. There would be huge slums on one street, on the next street people would be farming and chasing goats all over a pasture and on the third street there would be modern buildings that look like something you would see in the U.S. There were massive open-air markets built around highways and whenever a car stopped, a swarm of 10 people would try to sell anything from live chickens to video games.



We worked with the Missionaries of the Poor which was founded in 1981 in Kingston, Jamaica. Since 1981, MOP has opened 13 different missions in 9 different countries that have been committed to serving the poor. Their motto is “Joyful Service with Christ on the Cross,” and the brothers of MOP really take that to heart. The brothers run two orphanages, one for boys and the other for girls, which totals out to over 400 orphans that they take care of. Polygamy is a wide



spread practice in Uganda, so some men will take 4 or 5 wives with each wife having an average of 5 to 6 kids. Since many of the Ugandan men can't support having so many kids, a lot of the time they will take their babies and leave them in streets or alleys to get rid of them. The MOP go out and take in these kids. They provide them with a place to live, food and even give them an education. Since there is such a stigma around disabilities in Uganda, most of the kids born with defects are given to the orphanages for the brothers to take care of. In the boys' home, there is around 71 kids living with disabilities who can't go to school, who need to be taken care of 24/7 so there is always something that is needed to be

done. Needless to say, the brothers put us to work right away. We would get there in the mornings and help clean all the bedding as well as the dormitories from top to bottom. We helped to feed the children that could not feed themselves, hand washed laundry and played with the kids. There was this 12-year-old kid named Martin who was such a character. He would give everyone on our team massive hugs and when it was time to play, he and I would throw a frisbee around endlessly. He didn't know how to throw it or catch it, but he still tried and had a massive smile on his face the entire time. It made me realize how little my problems actually are. Martin was abandoned by his own family because of a mental illness and lives pretty much day to day, not knowing what his

future looks like, but he is still such a joyful person. I worry about so many 1st world problems that don't compare to the same problems that Martin goes through daily, so why have I not been as joyful, if not more so than Martin?

The orphanages were amazing but at the same time extremely hard on the heart. Orphans would be covered in their own feces and the only thing that they wanted was to be shown love. It was hard because my tendency was to pull back so that I wouldn't get covered in filth. After the first day at the orphanages, I was talking to one of the girls on the trip who was feeling just as overwhelmed as I was when she told me a story about Mother Theresa that I will never forget. Mother Theresa was walking the streets of Calcutta with a news reporter when she came across a child laying in the dirt. She picked up the boy and said "Oh my Jesus, oh my Jesus." Mother Theresa could see through Jesus's disguise and was able to see Jesus in the child. "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me," Matthew 25:35-36. Listening to that story really touched me. For the rest of the trip, whenever I was having a hard time loving, I reminded myself that I wasn't taking care of some random person, but I was actually taking care of Jesus Himself.

Along with working in the orphanages, we also went to different high schools to hang out with the students and answer any questions they had about America, the faith or about life in general. This was probably one of my favorite parts of the trip because I was able to make a deep connection with a lot of these young people. Many of them were just a year or two younger than me. It was so cool that I was able to relate to them so well even though we live a world apart. I was able to answer some of their tough questions that they had about God and I know that I helped them grow closer to Him.



Leaving Uganda was bittersweet. I was ready to go back home but at the same time, I felt like there was so much more work to be done. I had just barely scratched the surface of a seeming endless ocean. I am so grateful that I was able to experience what I did and to experience Jesus in the people I took care of. In many ways, writing this newsletter is frustrating. My capacity to describe this trip in words does not compare to my actual experience. I know that this trip was meant for giving but walking away from it I feel as though I have received so many blessings.

It is no exaggeration to say that this trip changed my life so *thank you*. May Christ's peace be with you forever.

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