

I did not have very many expectations going into this summer mission. The main expectations I had was that I would be equipped to share my faith with others more effectively and build up my confidence in doing so. And yet God has a way of giving us more than we expect, but that excess being exactly what we need.

Over the course of deciding to go on this summer mission, I had been told time and time again what the community would be like. A group of people that you can be vulnerable with, people you trust and love deeply. But experiencing that community was much different from just hearing about it. I found people who had lived wildly different lives leading up to the mission, and yet were open to talking about their experiences. People who were willing to lay their lives out before strangers knowing they might get hurt, but deciding that the reward for it far outweighed the risk. I realized that we aren't meant to walk this journey alone. Sure we have God by our sides, but there are so many times where Jesus and Paul tell us to find fellowship with each other. And for good reason, it was incredibly freeing being able to talk about things I hadn't talked about before, processed emotions I had pushed to the side for far too long, and listening to others go through the same thing I was. Community is a crucial part of our walks with God, and ignoring that need is a disservice to both ourselves and the people around us.

Another large thing that I learned from this mission is what it truly means to serve as leadership and not. It's hard to serve other people when you don't have the right heart or reasons for serving. On this trip, I was given the opportunity to lead a small action group, or bible study, with three other men. When I was being trained for that role, one of the Cru staff said something that really stuck with me. They said: "The point of leading these groups isn't to be walking in front of them and pulling them up to you, it is simply to love them and walk beside them in their own journey." There it is, the lesson about serving I learned. Serving is about loving them. And

the acts of service come from that love. Serving without love is tiring, it's genuinely exhausting. It's draining and burns you out very quickly. And yet serving in love is different. It can definitely drain you, tire you, it may even burn you out, but it is far easier to do than to serve without love. It fills you with life and joy, and quite frankly, serving is nothing without love. To love is to serve, and to serve is to love.

And finally the last big topic, evangelism. I'll be honest, I went into this mission with not the best mindset about evangelism. It felt like an obligation that I had to fulfill, something I needed to do to fulfill some unseen mission requirements. That got changed real quick on mission though. Just meeting all the staff and the heart and passion they had for sharing their faith kind of rubbed off on me and made me more excited to do evangelism. To do it out of love for God and for the people around us. We've been given this wonderful gift, who are we to keep it to ourselves and not share it? Over the course of the summer, our mission was to go to two different campuses every week in Chicago. The first was IIT, or Illinois Institute of Technology, and the other one was UIC, or University of Illinois at Chicago. Because it was summer time, a majority of the students on campus were international students. It was truly incredible to talk to and listen to these students talk about their faith and spirituality, coming from all different parts of the world. It genuinely surprised me just how many people were willing to talk about their faith or lack of. All of these conversations really forced me to reflect on my self-reliance and made me realize just how much God was working through us and not ourselves. A reminder that we can do all things through his strength, not our own.

This summer has been an incredible journey that I am incredibly thankful for. I've learned many things about myself, and many lessons I want to take into the future with me. Community is a crucial part of our journey and life is quite empty without others walking besides

us. Serving should come from a place of love, not of obligation or expectation. Serving without love is unsustainable, and Jesus served through his love, should we not seek to do the same? And there is no fear in sharing my faith with others. My worth is in Christ, my dignity, my hope. It is only through his power that others come to Christ, there is nothing I can do to mess His plan up. Thank you to everyone who supported me on this mission, both financially and through prayer. I truly appreciate the opportunity that I was given this summer and I am eternally grateful for all the support I received.