

This missions trip was an interesting one. There are a few new things I head-knowledge learned but everything else was more of hanging what I already understand on to the clothes line of my life and making it all fit. So understanding at a heart level and at a deeper level of, “Okay, what does this mean for this specific situation” was more prevalent.

I came in this year with the same fears as last year: that I would float invisibly on the margins of all the relationally and spiritually important happenings of the missions trip. I feared that my inability to be lighthearted and cheery and funny would get in the way of my relationships and because I value that so much, not having that would in turn ruin my mental stability and get in the way of everything else I tried to do.

The trip started out along the lines of these fears. I floated into and out of all the missions preparation meetings. Decisions would be discussed and made and I would have no voice or say in them, regardless of whether or not my heart was content or distraught from the decisions. Through meetings I barely said anything and felt my presence in the group waning to negligible. Josh came to me one time and asked why I wasn’t saying anything and challenged me to speak up. That wasn’t a solution but was helpful to know that though I tried to front, at least some one noticed and desired to support.

I don’t want to stick on this one narrative for too long so I’ll just say that in the car one time with Victor going to the medical clinic, the solution was brought up one more time and applied well. I was worried I was again going to freeze up around all the new doctor/medical school Brazilians we had just met. The solution was to forget myself entirely except for the fact that I was blessed to be included in God’s plan. All this worry about me freezing up and me being invisible and me not being funny and me getting in my own way were doing the opposite of what I desired. If I could give it up, God would give it back to me many times better. So in that moment I prayed that God would pull my focus out and pull my focus away from myself on to His Son. Usually resolutions like that are cool but never really do much. For whatever reason, it worked. A Chinese song came up whose English equivalent I knew but couldn’t put my finger on the lyrics. Victor and I slowly pieced it together and did so for a few more songs too. That was fun. I enjoyed that. Maybe the prayer was answered through this opportunity to focus so hard on something besides me, to focus on finding the lyrics. Who knows.

The camps were cool too. I have thoughts about a lot of the stuff but I don’t know where to start except to just continue with this stream of consciousness. It’s whatever if it’s not organized well enough to be followed.

Yonny. He was this chubby little 10? Year old who always had on a grey jacket with black sleeves and a really thin hoodie underneath it that was light blue and had light green stripes on it. He would have the hood up, covering his head up to his forehead. He seemed like a mature

little boy who didn't talk much. For the altar call the last night I don't think he raised his hand. And I didn't think he paid much attention to any of this Jesus stuff we were saying. But on the bus ride from the camp back home, there he was, sitting by the window with the gift of a Bible in his hands. He sat with it for so long, pouring through its pages, flipping continuously sometimes, and then pausing, as if he was determined to find something inside, and though things didn't make sense, he was curious enough to keep searching until he found something interesting. That was beautiful to be a part of and I want to give glory to God for that.

The skits were a beautiful thing to be a part of as well. The Chisel skit was my faves. I am glad that the risk I took to play the guy instead of God worked out well, especially because I had a good reason to and not because I wanted to take the spotlight or whatever. I really vibed with him. The lines in that skit are something really worth having memorized. "I am God's original masterpiece. And you are too. God doesn't make junk. You are an original masterpiece."

The Noah skit was also really fun just because being spontaneous and creative and seeing risks play out well is really enjoyable. I appreciate having been the main improviser for that skit and I am sure there is some level of prideful satisfaction in that.

I think I also felt like I got affirmation for my spiritual walk so far. Josh said I was more mature than last year. And I can see the ways in which I want to enjoy everything as they are, as derivatives and works of God. I received affirmation in that pursuit from John Piper's book about C.S. Lewis. And that leads me to the topic of books.

A lot of the reading I did was really helpful. God requiring us to worship Him isn't some ego trip, as if He needs us to show Him or prove to Him that He is God. No, if anything it is for the completion of our joy. Praising the Object of our joy is natural. While sightseeing through the cities in Brasil, it brings me delight to point things out to other people and enjoy them with company. I could just sit there and laugh at the fact that there is a Sex Shop open 24 hours a day, but I would be stifling the expression of that joy by keeping it to myself. No, I want to tell the other people in my missions team because it is funny and because sharing it with them increases my joy, not takes away from it, in the same way that lighting more candles does not take the flame away from the original candle.

Also, readings from C.S. Lewis and John Piper's reflections on that on emotions I have treasured in my heart. It is utterly useless for me to sit in some of my emotions and analyze them rather than be of them. This largely comes from my habit of hiding my emotions from other people, and so I stifle them. But it is bliss to not hide them and to be true and express them, good or bad. I know to be careful and not hurt others but I can express them with the supplement of I know these feelings and thoughts are not right and need help remolding them.

And Josh pointed out one thing to me saying that on this missions trip he's felt like he's been taken away from everything he is good at. For some things that was true for me because

usually I thoroughly enjoy being the person who everyone comes to with their problems and the person who looks out for the outsider and who has one on one deep conversations for people. Sometimes that didn't happen this trip and I am content to not make an idol out of them.

Enjoying the Amazon was also really cool, allowing me to enjoy the present and not be so self-centered and center my life on constantly sharpening myself. I wrote on July 22nd, "Living in the present is like sitting in the middle of a boat or bus by the window: you're not concerned with where you're going like people in the front may be, you're simply concerned with catching everything in your sight before it whizzes past your field of view and can experience it no longer." I mean, that's a cute little observation, but when I sat on the very tip of the boat, with my legs dangling in front and my toes skidding along the water's surface, I enjoyed the present. I didn't know where we were going, and as far as I was concerned we could have been lost and I would not have known. But the reflection of the Sun on the water and all the greens around us and the heat of the Sun on my back were nice. Living in the present is natural. C.S. Lewis said that all worry and sin comes from being concerned with either the past or future. This he contrasted with how God experiences everything as a constantly Present, where He is aware of all things that have and will happen and are happening. That's an intriguing set of thoughts.

Catching alligators and throwing sloths out of trees and fishing for piranhas and getting 122 mosquito bites and relaxing with my tempurpedic pillow on the Amazon water's edge and climbing vines in the jungle and being drenched with the waters of the Iguazu falls and playing games with tiny little Chinese-Brazilian babies and being anonymous during the Everything skit were all really enjoyable.

There are more to think about and write but I'm tired so I'm done. Also, I won't write more from the motivation of pride and competition.