

Joshua Chen

Looking back on this missions trip I feel like the greatest thing God has shown me is to rely on him when my own strength is simply inadequate. Numerous times in Brazil I saw God step up in unimaginable ways only when I finally surrendered all to him, when I finally put aside my pride and conceded that I couldn't go on anymore, or that the task was something way out of my skill set or comfort zone. My greatest struggle is pride, being able to do things excellently out of my own strength, and I feel like to me, this trip was all about God showing me that He is in control, both here and there, and that I should truly give up my life to Him.

I confess that I thought this trip would be easy. What could possibly go wrong? We've all done this before. I'm with the same team, teaching the same curriculum. Everything should be simple right? Little did I know how truly difficult everything would be. Everything started when Stanley and Esther couldn't go initially. That really stripped my sense of security and control. Not being able to turn to them to fix everything forced me to depend on God. Then came the pile of expectations and responsibilities that were way out of my comfort zone and skill set. My very first responsibility in Brazil was leading worship. Should be easy right? I've been a worship leader for years. I've been working with Victor for years. A worship set should be no problem. Okay, so what if it has to be in Chinese. Last year we did the same thing and it was perfectly fine. Oh wait, there's no Esther. Leading worship this year means actually leading the songs in Chinese. I can't read Chinese. I don't sing in Chinese. We get there and they're expecting a worship night. I don't have that many Chinese songs, and I don't have a Chinese singer. Totally humbling experience. Possibly the worst worship set I've ever led in my life. God used one of the skills I'm most confident in and took it away, forcing me to rely on Him and Him alone. This was just the start of many circumstances where reliance on God was the only way to go.

The first week of camp brought its own set of challenges. First and foremost was the lack of sleep. It was like continuously going for four days straight with no real rest. Add on to that a lack of control of the daily schedule and no down time made for a stressful week. I was rather annoyed a lot, partially due to the lack of sleep, and it felt like with no Stanley/Esther there, no one would stand up for us. There were hidden conflicts that we just weren't able to bring up. I wasn't used to feeling so helpless. And God was the only answer again. Just throughout, the constant theme was not of yourself, but God alone. God will provide. God brought Stanley and Esther when we really needed them. He put us under spiritual warfare, but also equipped us to fight it. God truly did not put a burden upon us more than we could bear. We just thought we couldn't bear it, but we just needed to depend on God. On and on go the list of things I couldn't do on my own strength. Lead small group? Possibly the thing I am least comfortable with. And in Chinese? Apparently I did well enough I suppose. Teach VBS in Chinese? I mean I've taught VBS before, but I've never been very good at it. I hate talking, especially for extended periods of time, and most certainly not in Chinese. God provided. Especially giving me the right words to say in possibly the best teaching I've ever done in either English or Chinese. Then we get to possibly the most amazing night in Brazil.

The joint Portuguese/Chinese worship service, of which I can lead worship in neither. Fine, so I got to sing songs in English. I should be most comfortable. Then I get sick. No voice = can't sing. The night where I'm actually inside my comfort zone, it looked like I simply wouldn't be able to even sing. We all prayed for my voice. And God answered. Not too soon, and not too late. He didn't heal me right away, or even the morning of the set. He allowed me to sing basically moments before I went up there. It was one of the most memorable nights of my life. One of the most amazing worship nights, with people worshipping in three languages. A small glimpse of heaven. God has a plan. I just needed to trust Him and depend totally on Him.

There were many other little things that I saw God work in. My trust in God has grown exponentially. The amount I depended on God and surrendered to Him in Brazil was far more than ever before. I pray that this continues. That I continue to trust Him, that He knows best, complete surrender.