

Ester To

Many thanks and praise that I was able to go with my husband to Brazil for STM.

We quite confusedly registered for the trip even though we were not clear what kind of a place we were going, what kind of a group we will be serving, or the itinerary. But we deeply believe that was an opportunity given by God to allow us to experience Him more.

There are not many Chinese in Brazil, may be about one hundred thousand. Many of those who immigrated from China operate snack shops or gift shops. They work very long hours at the stores and as a result, they are not able to go to church. In addition, because the taxes are very high and the government officials are corrupt, they said they will surely lose money if they observe all the rules and regulations. As a result, many Christians also cheat on taxes and launder money. One brother shared that, "in regards to cheating on taxes, everyone is doing it. But after I accepted Christ, I was convicted that this is not something that is pleasing to God. It is a sin and yet I continue doing it because I have a family to support. When I come face to face with God, I feel very ashamed. Because I know clearly that is sin and yet I continue to do it. Sometimes I wish I could just die. I would feel that someone like me should not go to church." When I heard such a sharing, I did not know what to say. But I understand that it is not an easy task for the local believers to follow in God's path. It is even more difficult for the tasks of discipling the believers and sharing the gospel.

Having said that, I also saw many of God's faithful servants serving Him quietly. One example was the owner of the Sao Paulo Hotel. Her life witness and her encouragement was like God giving our trip a booster. Seeing how the teachers from the Happy Kids and Happy Teens Ministries offer up their service allow me to have a different understanding of "with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind". Most of them started young and taught for more than ten years, with only a few days of holidays a year. Many of them are singles, allowing themselves more time to focus on serving. We met a lot of pastors, elders, deacons at the local churches and saw how the Chinese community offer up their time and effort greatly humbled me. There was a Deacon, well advanced in age, who sometimes would get sleepy while driving but still visit various snack shops every week to pass out gospel tracts. He does not speak Cantonese or can express himself well but still able to hang out with the local Chinese at the shops. By quietly offering himself, he allows others to see a heart that is pure and fearful of our Lord.

Many years ago, I went with a missionary to visit a remote village. He was already sixty some years old. After hiking for three hours, we arrived at the entrance to the village. It was beginning to get dark but many villagers surrounded us. Just then the first words the missionary said were, "Today I have the opportunity to be here again is to tell you one thing—that God loves each of you dearly." Then he wept.

This STM to Brazil let me understand why missionaries are willing to offer their entire lives in engaging things that the world sees as outrageous ... to tell those they had been called to reach out that "Lord Jesus loves you!"

I give thanks to the Lord for allowing me this opportunity to Brazil and saw the people He loves and tell them that Jesus loves them.