

Daily Report
July 8, 2010

What an incredible week it has been! First of all, I want to thank all the interns and missionaries and what an encouragement they have been to me. God is so good, and I can see him shining through the Dominicans! What a humbling experience it is to witness our brothers and sisters in Christ in another part of the world spreading God's love! I woke up this morning to a beautiful sunrise, so very excited to start a new day! Today we went to the hospital in Puerta Plata to hand out care packets to the patients. It was heart wrenching to see people between the ages of 4 to 65 in so many different situations. As I walked through the doors, it was an overwhelming feeling. There was so much need, and I thought to myself "What can I do?" But we serve a mighty God, because He showed me that playing a child or praying with someone can make the biggest impact on their life! It amazed me how happy they were to see us, despite their circumstance! We also went to the dump today and it gave me such joy to play Frisbee with the kids and to read Bible stories to them! As this being our last day in this amazing country, I realize that I have changed. I came here hoping to change lives, but it's me that has changed. I truly believe I have been blessed to be a blessing. It's funny how God works that way! This trip has instilled in me a thirst to be better and to honor God, no matter what the circumstance and to be joyful with what I have! I also want to thank Jake & Shelly, Phil & Jana, and the rest of the team for being a true example of sharing God's love! My prayer is that we all continue to be bold for Christ and to look for God in the small things! This has been an unforgettable experience, and I love you all so much! ☺ Lauren

As our 757 began to make its decent into Puerto Plata, Republica Dominicana, I could only attempt to imagine what we had in store for us over the next 168 hours. I felt like Paul, or one of the other first century missionaries who ventured over large bodies of water into foreign countries in an attempt to spread the gospel. We eventually dropped enough in altitude to see the turquoise waters surrounding the Island and I heard Matt announce; "Now that's what water's supposed to look like." Genesis 1:10

Eventually, the unending cycle of heat, eat, and sleep began, and as a result, memories tend to get churned together. The ones that stand out, however, tend to do so in an incredible way. On what I believe was the day after our arrival, Chad, Jake, JD, and I walked home with 3 of the young attendees of our very first Dominican VBS. (The VBS, by the way, was one of the most hectic, entertaining, and rewarding adventures of the trip. Matthew 19:14) We followed the young boys through the side streets and alleyways of Rio San Juan until we suddenly emerged in a shaded gathering place adjacent to the boys' home. The boys, two of them brothers and one their cousin, lived with their single mothers and were looked after by their grandma/great aunt, who was at the house when we arrived. Although I speak very little Spanish, and I speak none at the same pace as Dominicans, it was very enjoyable to observe the home life of the Dominican family who graciously entertained us at their home. The female authority in the home scolded her grandson, when he disobeyed her, in a manner and tone that looked much too familiar. The boys drew a circle in the dirt and played marbles for the remainder of our visit. Exodus 20:12. I drew so many correlations between American and Dominican home life, mannerisms, and people that much of the initial "otherness" felt regarding the Dominican people was gone. Genesis 1:27

Following our first visit to a Dominican home, we returned to the Manna DR Outreach Center in Rio San Juan. Once there, one of the boys who shadows the Manna DR team virtually every day motioned for me to follow him. He hopped from the 2nd floor of the Outreach Center onto the roof of a concrete shed next door, and I, of course, followed suit. We sat in the hot sun and talked. Ranger, the boy, speaks English well, so conversation came easily. We discussed the obvious things: cola, the differences between Americans and Gringos, and Ranger's favorite show, Family Guy. His memories of the show were not very vivid, however, and he was quick to inform me that he hadn't watched TV in 4 years because "there are more important things in life." Philippians 4:8

A couple days later, after mixing concrete in Rio San Juan, we ventured to the local swimming hole. Being an adventurous person, I automatically scanned the area for an elevated platform from which to jump into the water. We were forbidden by the Manna interns to jump off the rock in the middle of the stream, so I chose the grassy ledge on the edge of the water. Angel, another boy who considers the Manna team his second family, accompanied me. Angel speaks English, but he was not familiar with some of the terms associated with acrobatics. Instead of describing "back flip" and "front flip", I just showed him their meanings. He was definitely familiar with them, and we had lots of fun one-upping each other. Even though Angel is a Dominican, I felt the same connection with him as I did with Ranger. They are two great kids who have the ability to do even greater things than I can imagine. John 14:12

While at the river and at church the following morning, I observed my mom interacting with small children. After saving one small Dominican boy from almost drowning, she took it upon herself to teach half the kids on the road to Bobita how to swim. Then, in church the next morning, I felt like I was sitting in a church service at Clear Creek or another American church. Two thousand miles from TN, kids are still coaxed into momentary silence by animal crackers, jolly ranchers, and coloring books. My mom discovered this while holding Givens, a small Dominican boy. She refused to let the language barrier hold her back anymore as she held him that morning and we praised in different forms, fashions, and languages. Psalm 150

Going into Monday, I was more nervous than I had been the entire trip. Families whose homes were scattered throughout Rio San Juan had opened their doors and invited us over for food and fellowship. I was concerned about sanitation, communication, and the food. I prayed about my concerns, and God came through big time. Our house (the one Rebekah, Lauren, Caitlyn, Emily, Audrey, and I went to) was incredible. It had glossy tile floors, fans, TV, cable, a computer, nice furniture, modern appliances, and a loving family. It was definitely sanitary, and communication was equally as present. Not only is Mrs. Rebekah fluent in Spanish, but the nephew of the owner of the house is fluent in English. My last concern, about the food, vanished when I saw the table fill with platters full of chicken legs, beef, rice, plantains, beans, and salad. After our meal, our courteous hostess refused to allow us to assist her in cleaning up. Her husband didn't argue with her, and he happily fraternized with us for the remainder of our visit. Luke 10:38-42. Seeing Mr. and Mrs. Onias interact was a huge inspiration. In an area where it is rare to find a couple still together after having children, it is even more rare to find one still happy, playful, and in love. It was obvious that this couple had taken 1 Corinthians 13 to heart.

The following day, we went to the hospital, historic fort, and dump. In the hospital, each member of our team seemed to automatically assume a distinct role. Whether they were handing out care packets, leading a prayer, singing, talking with the patients and family members, or simply smiling at everyone, each person was exactly where God intended for them to be, and playing the role God had designed for them. 1 Corinthians 12.

After leaving the hospital, we drove across town to an old fort built in the mid-1500s. We enjoyed a lunch of sandwiches under a tree by the fort before we headed to the dump.

As we pulled up in the Daihatsu across the street from the dump, children ran up to meet us. It was heart breaking to know that those loveable children call the dump their home. In the midst of the craziness, one kid stuck out to me. He smiled only once that I saw and didn't like people to interact with him. I notice that he was holding only one thing: a plastic bag with grain or oats mixed with his own saliva. He sucked on it the entire time we were there, even while Nathan, who had sat the boy in his lap, rocked him to sleep. He seemed to find comfort in Nathan's arms and in his sack of mush. He didn't cry or complain once. I desperately wanted to take him home, feed him, and give him shelter. I felt guilty for having so much and giving so little. James 1:27

The Manna Team is doing great things in Bobita, Rio San Juan, and Puerto Plata, and I am honored to have had the opportunity to serve with them. Matthew 28: 19-20

Kidron Cannon