

Hello friends . . . grace and peace,

Every summer (with rare exception), the St. Thomas Youth Group [www.styg.com](http://www.styg.com) organizes a “love journey” for students. The summer of 2023 was no different as 29 of us just got back from Mexico where we built 2 houses for 2 families in 1 week. However...

When you make plans to take a group of middle school, high school, and college students to Ciudad Juarez in order to build 2 houses in 1 week for 2 families, it’s easy to make the mistake in thinking that the reason you’re all going, is to build 2 houses.

But that’s not why we went.

It’s also very easy, when taking a group of students on a mission trip (aka “Love Journey”), to believe that our purpose is to somehow bring God/Jesus/bible/Church to the people and places we’re going.

But that’s not why we went.

Well, if you didn’t go to build the houses and you didn’t go to bring God with you, why DID you go? What was the POINT, Aran??

One word: “Practice”

Faith, religion, belief systems . . . none of them have any sort of depth to them on their own. They don’t become true and meaningful things until there’s action and energy behind them. I can say I believe in just about anything but until I actually DO something as a result of my beliefs and my faith? It’s just noise. A clanging cymbal. A numb and lifeless faith.

As we approach another season of the OTHER religion in this part of the world – Green Bay Packers Football – it makes sense to think of faith as described above. Because I can learn all about the rules of football, how to think about the plays they run, the names of the players, the team’s records and stats, but until I actually PRACTICE the game, and then PLAY it? I’m really not a part of it.

Faith is no different. If I read the bible every day but never put its words into practice in my life, there’s no change being made in the world. If I memorize the names in Jesus’ genealogy, what’s the point unless that knowledge impacts the lives of the people around me in some helpful and hopeful way?

The things we believe as Jesus followers have to be practiced and then put into action. This is how we approach our mission trips and “Love Journeys” with our students. We go somewhere to help and serve others, yes. But while we’re there, we press HARD into some deep spiritual truths and practices. We train together by looking around and noticing what God is doing in our

midst. But THEN, the point is that once we're back home, we're BETTER and doing the things that help make this world look a little more like what God wants it to be.

If you'd like to hear more, check out the sermon from Sunday, July 30 at St. Thomas. Our students shared some pretty incredible things during the sermon! You can find it on St. Thomas' YouTube channel [www.youtube.com/stthomaswi](http://www.youtube.com/stthomaswi) in the video entitled "Hope Built Up".

peace to you

