

This past summer, I had the unforgettable opportunity to travel to Chimbote, Peru on a mission trip with my church, Waypoint Community Church. Chimbote is a city with extreme poverty, having an unemployment/underemployment rate at 70%. Growing up, I had volunteered at underprivileged schools and sober livings, so I have seen poverty within our community. However, nothing could have prepared me for the poverty I saw in Chimbote.

Traveling to Chimbote was exhausting. We started in the Charlotte Douglas Airport, and flew into Atlanta. From Atlanta, we flew 8 hours to Lima, Peru. Then, from Lima, we had an 8 hour bus ride to Chimbote. *I Am 24/7* is a Charlotte organization that joined us in Peru. The group teaches young boys (typically living in Grier Heights) how to grow into men of God. Most of the boys that came on the trip with us had never been on a plane before, so it was fun watching them experience their first ever flight. While we were there, we stayed in a church called Nuestra Señora Perpetuo Socorro. The people of the church took great care of us during the 8 days we stayed with them.

We were organized into 3 different groups to complete 3 different projects. One group revamped a church, one built a house, and my group built a daycare center. The projects were located about 45 minutes from the church where we were staying, in locations called invasions. Invasions are located all around Chimbote. They're called invasions because families would literally invade a giant area of land and build their houses there. Their houses were typically made of sticks and branches, really whatever they could find. Although the construction of the daycare center was fun, my favorite part of the trip was connecting with all the children of the invasions. None of them knew any English, so it was a fun challenge being able to practice my Spanish knowledge every day! My friend David, a *I Am 24/7* member said, "My favorite part was getting to see just how much of an impact we made on those kid's lives. The smiles, the laughs, and just the overall positive vibe when they saw us was amazing. They were very welcoming and grateful for us being there, so anytime we got to the site was my favorite part."

The best takeaway I received from this trip is how close I got with God. Throughout my life, I had always gone to church, attended bible studies, and was even confirmed in 8th grade. However, I had never been seriously in touch with my faith until after this trip. I found it incredible seeing how happy these people are, even when they have close to nothing. It really made me think about how blessed I am to be living the

way that I do, and the opportunities that I am given. My dad is a very spiritual man, and I am beyond grateful that he asked me to go on this trip with him, because it truly did change my entire perception of the world.

The most spiritual moment I experienced happened on the last night we were there. The church planned a celebration for us, thanking us for our work. During the celebration, all of the kids of Waypoint and I Am 24/7 were invited to come to the front of the church and sing. The church door was open, and from where I was standing, I could see the mural of Jesus that my dad had painted on his previous trip to Chimbote on the wall across from the church. The combination of the singing and viewing the church and my dad's mural was incredible. God's presence was tangible in that moment.

I am beyond blessed that I was given this incredible opportunity to go to Chimbote and do God's work. On the plane ride to Peru, I knew I was going to be helping people. On the way home from Peru, I recognized how much more the people helped me. This trip taught me just how important it is to help others, and you really get out of this life what you put into it. I am so excited to continue to journey to Chimbote for many Summers to come!

The next journey I will be taking will be an abroad experience in Barcelona, Spain. I will be there from January 22th to April 27th. I am beyond excited to use my new travel, cultural, and Spanish skills in a whole new country for 3 months!