

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

<sup>1</sup> Por lo tanto, hermanos, tomando en cuenta la misericordia de Dios, les ruego que cada uno de ustedes, en adoración espiritual, ofrezca su cuerpo como sacrificio vivo, \*santo y agradable a Dios.<sup>2</sup> No se amolden al mundo actual, sino sean transformados mediante la renovación de su mente. Así podrán comprobar cuál es la voluntad de Dios, buena, agradable y perfecta.

That's one of my favorite pieces of Scripture, because there is so much packed into those two verses. I have it on the front page of my prayer journal and I have it in Spanish on my facebook page. And I think one of the easiest things to see in it is the line which they usually give to this whole passage as a title: "Living Sacrifices." And having been in Ecuador for the last year, I've definitely learned and seen that that is what Missions is all about, living every aspect of your life and giving it to God in a way that's pleasing to Him. But the thing that sticks out to me more and more lately is in verse 2, where Paul tells us, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Every one of us has a story. We're all here in what we'd call in Ecuadorian Spanish "El templo," the house of God, and all of us are here for a reason. Whether we grew up here or had a first encounter with the Lord later on, we're here now responding to the way that He first loved and interacted with us. My study Bible puts it that God wants us to be transformed as we live to honor and obey him, because He gave His Son to make that new life possible. The more we recognize and experience God in our lives, the more we are transformed for Him in a visible way.

My friend Cameron, who is now a career missionary, laughs and tells us how she grew up thinking of missionaries as people just a "little too crazy about Jesus," and how she was sure they were great people, but you certainly wouldn't want to grow up to be one. Well, much the same way, when I was in high school and I heard the word "testimony," I thought of it like a four-letter word. I grew up in the church, I knew Jesus, and just because I couldn't (and/or didn't want to) stand up and articulate that

in a ten-minute speech didn't mean I was headed the wrong direction when I died. And I'm still not saying that's a requirement to get past St. Peter or anything.

The first time I ever *really* had to verbally give my testimony in some kind of semi-organized, formal way was in the Ecuadorian jungle during my first internship with Youth World. I've had to do it several times since then, and I have to admit it still terrifies me a little (if you can be terrified "a little"). But it's always amazing to me sitting around in a group sharing or listening to anyone else's story of faith how much work God does in and through each one of us. Even for those of us who have grown up a part of the Church and stayed a part of the Church, ours might not sound as dramatic as other stories, but it's God's work in us that is evident and important.

One of the things I always mention when I tell my own testimony is one of my close friends who helped me "renew my mind," so to speak. This was somebody who got to see me at church and at school and with our friends, and finally just got fed up with me and called me out, saying that I could be a completely different person around my friends than I was at church or Bible Study or around her. And I didn't want to admit it at the time, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that she was absolutely right.

Having her speak God's will into my life in that way and at that time and allowing Him to change some of the ways I spoke and acted led to some really cool things, one of which was a Bible Study that we did that totally changed my thinking on some different things and really helped me to learn and grow. Having grown up in the Church and hearing sermons and Sunday School lessons didn't make me need any of that any less [insert something intelligent here]

Aside from meeting and working with awesome people in the Quito Quest department when I hosted teams, one of the coolest things I got to do last year was to participate in an Ecuadorian mission team. A group of people from my Ecuadorian home church, Misión Emaús, spent a long weekend

travelling to and working in the jungle city of Shell, Ecuador, at the new property of La Casa de Fe orphanage.

Some of the group had been the summer before with a team from Christ Episcopal Church, and they had been begging Cameron and the Youth World staff to be able to go back for over a year. It was awesome to see their excitement, especially those who had heard about the 2008 experience and were joining the team for the first time, because the others' excitement rubbed off on them. It was also really great to hear how excited the orphanage staff were to have a mostly-Ecuadorian team.

When we got to Shell, we had a short orientation, but pretty immediately got to work moving concrete blocks from the ground to the second floor. The three guys who work there all the time would throw the blocks from the truck to the guys on the second floor, who would throw them down the line, who would eventually pass them to the women, who would eventually stack them all up at the end of the line. It took a couple hours, and before we had even had time to go see the children at the orphanage or set up our beds or even have a snack, we should have all been exhausted. The gringos were exhausted, but we all just continued plugging away at whatever project came up.

Between morning and evening devotions each day, we would move blocks, dig out and even the floors, clear out boulders, shovel in better dirt for the foundation, mix and pour concrete. I literally have never worked so hard in my life even on all the teams that I have hosted, and I would have barely been keeping up if I *hadn't* been having a massive allergic reaction to the entire jungle.

After the first day, my body was quite simply wiped out. I spent a good chunk of our second day sitting on the steps trying to get my eyes and my nose and my head to clear out and to get enough energy to stand up. But I got to watch all the activity around me and really appreciate it. I mean really, who gets excited to go throw concrete blocks around and dig up hard, boulder-y ground? Raise your hand if that sounds like the weekend you've had so far. Most of us probably spend yesterday on the

river or watching college ball, or shopping, or something enjoyable and all about us. That's the kind of stuff you expect to look forward to for the weekend.

And yet here were a dozen of the hardest-working people I know, who certainly weren't getting paid vacation to be here, and working just as hard or harder than they do during the week. And smiling about it. Why? Not for themselves, for sure. They were excited to serve.

That's a group who has been transformed. I know some of their stories. I know what they did for a living and how much education they had and how their relationships were with their families before they became a part of the church community of Emaús. I know what God has done in their lives because of the time I've spent with them, and because of some of their patience with my terrible Spanish.

But that October day in the jungle, I didn't need to. I didn't need to know a thing about anyone there. I could see it. I could see it in their attitudes and their enthusiasm. They hadn't signed up for a Short-Term Mission experience to feel good about themselves and check something off their guilt lists. They were excitedly taking the opportunity to give of themselves and their time and their energy and skills to serve God, to show their faith to the people around them, to help an organization that wants to bring up 80+ kids in the light of God's love.