

Good morning. My name is Marjorie Bowerman.

In The Letter of James, the Bible tells us that, “Faith without works is dead.” Personally, I want to amend this statement to say that, “Faith without works is stunted.” I had faith before travelling to West Virginia, but my faith wasn’t alive or vibrant, and I didn’t recognize that God’s love envelopes all of us like a warm blanket. I realize now that I was waiting for my lightbulb moment — I was waiting for God to come bursting through the door. I was waiting for belief to come to me, not realizing that it’s the other way around. God, and all the love and belief that come with him, were waiting for me.

I’ve been doing community service since I was in middle school, ranging from Girl Scout projects and Community Lunch to little kids’ dance classes and Sunday School. Service remains to this day a commonplace part of my week, and as admirable as that is, I’d grown complacent in my faith, thinking that teaching Bible stories to five-year-olds was the peak of my faith journey. As Yoda would’ve said to me, “Much to learn, you still have.”

The work that I did in West Virginia was like no service I’ve ever given. Instead of demonstrating plies, I hammered nail after nail after infuriating nail. Instead of planned out my Bronze Award project, I puzzled through dozens of warped, half-rotted floorboards. Instead of serving salad, I crawled through dirt and debris underneath those floorboards to hammer those infuriating nails. My feelings of accomplishment throughout this past week are hard to put into words. And the bonds of companionship formed with the rest of the youth group — they are beyond words altogether.

Our last night in West Virginia, we washed each other’s feet in the spirit of Jesus Christ. As we prayed and sang for each other, some began to cry and the heavens joined us in our tears. We sang louder, stronger, and the raindrops pounded harder on the roof of the church in response. We ended that worship in silent prayer and when we raised our heads, the summer storm had passed, leaving only blue skies to brighten our day and rainwater to nourish our resurrected faith.

West Virginia Reflection

Hi everyone, my name is Camille Ford and I was a member of Crew Seven, also known as wasaiEE. Over the past week, our group has worked together to grow our faiths while also striving to place faith in the strong community of Clendenin, West Virginia. Through our work pouring concrete at the local theatre, lovingly known as the Roxy, Crew Seven uncovered valuable information about Clendenin, our faith and each other. However, I don’t think I truly realized the significance of this week until I got home and looked back on the interactions that took place.

One of my favorites of these memories was through the literal shedding of blood, sweat, and tears of 2 of our group members, Elijah and Bob. Throughout the workday, our crew continually breathed in dry concrete mix, taking a toll on our sinus systems. Because of this, one afternoon, Elijah got a bloody nose. While the rest of us freaked out, probably secretly hoping

this wouldn't happen to us, Bob calmly told Elijah to go outside and lay down in the grass. So, Elijah moseyed on outside, the rest of us following in anticipation wondering just what Bob was gonna do. Then, Bob lifted Elijah's leg and swiftly hit him three times on the bottom of the foot. And, what do you know--his nose stopped bleeding. Just like magic.

The Towson Presbyterian youth group gathered last Sunday morning not knowing much else about each other than names, ages, and what school we went to. But by the end of the week, our group had grown an immeasurable amount. More people were coming out of their comfort zones, deeper, more personal devotionals were shared, and the feeling of one, united group, energetic and ready to share a love of Christ with each other and the world emerged. The definition of a group itself is; a number of people or things that are located close together or are considered or classed together. This is where I saw God this week. In a group of willing, loving, humble servants, who have no limit to the grace in their heart.

I felt this love firsthand on night one, when I shared the news that my family will be moving 780 miles away at the end of this month. Jesus calls us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, but this group of 16 children of God expressed love to someone far from a neighbor, never wavering in acceptance or devotion. The outstanding people I shared the last week with will forever hold a place in my heart; every single one of them is love in action, treating not only their neighbor, but also many more as themselves.

I don't believe I'm the only one who thought leaving on the last day would be easier than it was. The friendships we built are something all of us will look back at and cherish forever. I'd like to end by sharing a piece of scripture that paints how I feel perfectly. It's Philipians 1:3-7.

“I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.