

We chased each other across the green basketball/soccer court in zigzags, barely avoiding constant collision as the rain pounded down on the high metal roof in sheets. It rained every summer afternoon in Hocabá, Yucatán. We could hardly hear each other above the din, but that didn't stop us from playing a myriad of games, from soccer to a form of ping pong, minus a table, to jump rope improvisation -- anything to keep smiles blooming on their young, impressionable faces. We even ventured into deep waters and attempted playing games that involved language, our densest barrier. "Red light, green light" was manageable, even though most of us spoke very little Spanish and we had a few little friends who spoke more Mayan than Spanish. "Rojo" and "verde" were easy enough to memorize, but after a while, the same kids kept winning and we all wanted to play something new.

Soon the kids all agreed in mumbled, fast, and likely abbreviated Spanish to play a game that they all knew, but that we were quite unaware of. All I could understand was the word "lobo:" wolf. We tried to tell them that we would watch first, but that didn't get translated fast enough and wouldn't have gone over well anyway, so we tried to catch on as we went. It turned out that it was a mix between "ring around the rosy", Little Red Riding Hood, and tag. First, we all walked in a circle, holding hands, except for one new friend who stood outside and talked back and forth with the rest of the group responded with preplanned and well-known lines. The group would ask, "What are you doing, wolf?" to which the "wolf" would respond, "I'm just brushing my hair." When asked again, he might say, "I'm just brushing my teeth." The third time he was asked, all the little arms in the circle began tensing up and the circle slowed down as they prepared for the real answer: "I'm going to eat you!" Then a giant game of tag ensued that usually concluded with at least a few accidents between kids playing our game and kids playing other games. Needless to say, it was the best of times; it was the craziest of times.

Somewhere in-between rounds of this new game, my new friend Yuriko tried to ask me something in rapid-fire Spanish; even with my 5 years of Spanish in school and a mom who taught high school Spanish before I was born, I had no clue what Yuriko was saying. I tried to joke my way out of not understanding, but she persisted until I felt utterly lost and we reached a point of role reversal: she yelled her message in slow and more clearly enunciated Spanish while shaking my arms (she couldn't reach my shoulders). It was at that moment, during the half of our day that seemed like the less service-oriented when compared with pouring cement for a church gathering space, that my eyes were opened to see what the true attitude and heart of a servant looks like. The whole trip prior to that moment, I had been, not smug, but a little self-righteous for the good work I was doing. After all, it was hard work that I was choosing to push myself through, and it seemed like this was a perfect example of being the hands and feet of Jesus Christ. However, I had been missing the **eyes** and **heart** of Christ.

I had witnessed the needs of the people, but glossed over the people themselves. We had driven past their houses, but I had chosen to see the area as quaint and simple instead of considering the history of the town and the people in it. I had chosen to believe that what I had heard in Spanish class -- that all Latin and South American governments were corrupted and evil -- applied to Hocabá; that is, until the governor sent a track loader (Bobcat) to flatten out a pile of foundation dirt that would have taken us a whole day to move with shovels, buckets, and wheel barrows. I had labeled the kids that came to Bible School as needy, instead of seeing them as someone's son or daughter. It was easy to pray for my friend Amelia because she had somehow contracted a sickness, we guessed from drinking impure local water, that left her unable to keep food down; however, it was difficult to pray for another teammate staying in the house next door who complained about not having enough fans when my house had none.

Unfortunately, it took Yuriko's literal shaking to wake me up to my tunnel vision; I was forgetting that the people we were serving were in fact people, with pasts and futures. They weren't just Mexicans, or even just residents of Hocabá who we were serving. They were children of God who had just as much to offer to me as I had to give to them. Every circumstance that took me out of my comfort zone, from riding in the back of a pickup truck going at least 30 mph, to being offered a drink from a communal dish by my insistent *amiga*, Yuriko, taught me a lesson in priorities and culture.

I never did figure out what she was trying to tell me, but I did decipher what God had been trying to teach me: my service is just labor that anyone could do, unless I make the effort to understand the people I am serving. The heart of a Servant is not only humble and generous but also wise and cognizant.

This coming summer I will be going back to Mexico, specifically to the Yucatán Peninsula, with my mom and about 20 other team members. Our assignment will be in a different village, but we will continue to work with Acción Ministries as members of our church have done for over 25 years. I will be planning our team's meals and leading our large-scale shopping trip in Cancun before we drive inland to the village where we serve. Though I cannot say that I have attained a pure servant's heart, I know now to keep my eyes open for bridges that will connect me to the people I am serving, both the residents and those on my team as well.

Romans 12: 9-19

<sup>9-10</sup> Love from the center of who you are; *don't fake it*. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. *Be good friends who love deeply*; practice playing second fiddle.

<sup>11-13</sup> Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. *Be alert servants of the Master*, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; *be inventive* in hospitality.

14-16 Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; *don't be stuck-up*. Make friends with nobodies; *don't be the great somebody*.

17-19 Don't hit back; *discover beauty in everyone*. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it."