

On August 1, 2012 our team of youths and adults set out on a mission trip to Myanmar where we would teach English to children at an orphanage in Lashio. Myanmar threw a lot of surprises at us during our stay. We arrived in Lashio and were received by warm hearts and open arms. The kids ate the food that they grew in the fields, resulting in a primarily vegetarian diet. However, the mission teams that culminated at the orphanage from the US, Malaysia, and other various countries were provided with amazing meals that consisted of three to four meat dishes. We were all so humbled by the hospitality that the orphanage provided us. One particular meal was bought by a friend of Lillian's mother. The children ate with us and many of them went back for seconds and thirds. During that meal, we were able to break language barriers and relate to the students at the orphanage.

The students that we taught also surprised us. After the first day of introductions, we learned that the kids had a wide range of English vocabulary. They were very knowledgeable and we found that the lesson plans that we had prepared were too easy for them. As a result, every night at 8:30, the youths would meet up with Andrew in the hotel lobby, drawing up lesson plans for the next day. We shifted our focus from vocabulary to grammar so that the student would be able to use the vocabulary that they already had and properly string them together to communicate in English. Our students consisted of eight to ten girls that were fifteen to seventeen years old (which was another surprise because I thought we would be teaching elementary school students). All of the boys in that age group were not present in class since they went to study Burmese during the weekdays. I personally felt that we grew very close to the girls. Their English skills were very impressive. A sentence that one of the girls came up with was "Everybody thinks that she is fat, but I don't think so" which earned a lot of laughs from the teachers. We had many opportunities to bond with the students. On the eighth, we spent the entire day playing various games with different groups. Xian xian, a young girl, taught us to play "five stones" a very difficult marble catching game. Next to them, Ma Tairong, a seven year old boy, lead the boys in a game that used the juggling balls that our mission trip team gave them as prizes. One boy would stand against the wall and raise their hand as a target while the next boy in line used the ball to hit the target. This really touched me as I was able to observe how the kids creatively used what resources they had to entertain themselves. We called them all into the classroom to play telephone charades. Afterwards, we played two rounds of Mafia before the kids and teachers dispersed. I played a hand game with the girls that resembled "Down by the banks" and then moved to a small pagoda near the classroom so we could play "Da Feng Chui". We played for two hours straight without stopping as kids rotated in and out however they pleased. Time flew and I hadn't even realized how long we were playing until Vivian said she needed to go study. The rest of the younger girls ushered me to see the orphanage's garden, pointing out at various different flowers and telling me to take pictures of them. There was a huge field of flowers that looked like lilies that the little kids liked to walk on top of even though it was very dangerous. In the spring time, the purple flowers could be dried up and used to make their rice turn purple. After the girls deemed that I

had taken a sufficient amount of pictures, they brought me back to the dining area of the orphanage where the adults and other youths were waiting. Spending an entire afternoon with the children was exhausting, but rewarding because I felt that I had gained new friends as well as new knowledge about their every day lives.

The last surprise that probably hit me the most was the unshakable faith of the people of Burma. On August 5<sup>th</sup> after Sunday service, we visited the more rural areas of Lashio. We visited a total of thirteen families/ households and prayed for their personal needs. At first I regarded these families with pity since they had so little and were undergoing hardships. However, by the time I reached the fourth house I realized that they people lived a simple life and didn't view these hardships as hardships. Each and every one of these people described how thankful they were for all of the things that God had provided them with. These people also openly declared their faith. Lashio had a number of churches as well as other buildings/ institutions that displayed crosses. This was unexpected because I thought that the government would suppress certain religious practices.

During our mission trip, I feel that God has really touched me. He has revealed to me that no matter what happens, He will always provide for his people. The power of prayer and giving thanks has also magnified in importance as we've witnessed countless miracles such as healthy recovery and not missing our flight. As Paul writes:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.  
(Philippians 4:4-7 ESV)

Paul's prescription for peace is a good reminder that God is in control and cares about everything in our lives. He knows the needs we have and wants us to simply obey, worry less, and pray more. Living in this world can be stressful, and it is easy to get overwhelmed. Issues can weigh us down daily but the Bible provides a way to deal with these obstacles and gives us the promise of peace. Life will never become perfect, but the Problem Solver helps us put things in perspective and calms us down as we put our problems in His hands.