

“What is the Meaning of Service?”

Volunteerism is and has always been a large part of who I am. I started serving my community as a small child with my parents and still do to this day at my church and school in various clubs. I am a firm believer that service is the greatest act of kindness one human being can do for another. When we serve, we are intentionally and selflessly giving of ourselves to help someone who at that time cannot help themselves without expecting anything in return. It is life's greatest lesson once learned.

I serve tirelessly with the youth group at my church called “Devoted.” We go to various nursing homes in the community while spending the day with the residents, play games, manicures, and serve single moms by doing odd jobs for them such as yard work and cleaning the home. We distribute turkeys and hams on behalf of the church to single mothers, widows, and families in need during the holidays. I have also served with the 225 Clean Up where members of the community and churches come together to clean low income neighborhoods. Through Key club, BETA club, and national honor society at school, I have volunteered in basically every entity of the community. For example, tutoring, food banks, and festivals are just a few.

Going on a mission trip has always been a dream of mine and when my parents thought I was ready I was ecstatic. Every year my church engages in several mission trips within the United States and abroad. That year the church did something different; they allowed the Devoted youth group to go on two of their own mission trips. One group of students would travel to Honduras and the other to El Paso, Texas. So I signed up for the Honduras trip because I believed it would be a great experience for me. I would be giving back to the less fortunate and I

would be able to travel outside of the country, but unfortunately I could not attend. There was a new age cap and I was only a year under, so I wound up in El Paso for a week.

At first, I wondered what in the world was in El Paso, Texas. There were other people going to places like Africa and Spain. Who needed our help? What could I possibly do there? As it turns out, there was plenty to do.

We gave out water and food to people who could not afford to get any on their own. Another day we went door to door and prayed with people who felt they needed someone to just be there for them and to give them hope. We took food and water to the local police stations and fire stations to let the workers know how much they are appreciated and to thank them for keeping the citizens safe. We visited a rehab center, that also served as their home for the time being, for women who were recovering from drug addictions. On the last day we planned a community block party filled with fun activities such as face painting for kids, games for teens, and food for everyone. I remember there was one game that we played in an open field and it was similar to dodgeball but with archery. We had so much fun and it made me happy to see the joy on everyone's faces. I stopped and looked around and found it amazing to see how happy they were with so little.

When I traveled with my church youth group to El Paso, Texas, little did I know how much of an impact it would have on me. The trip taught me to go into new experiences with an open mind and an open heart. The people who live in El Paso have the most beautiful souls that I have ever met. The trip also taught me it does not matter where one goes but what one does to touch someone's heart. I have completed a lot of service hours and projects but my mission trip to El Paso had the greatest impact on my life. I learned so much about myself, who I wanted to

be in life, and what I wanted to do. I will never forget that when we serve others we are at our best, because we have purposely put everything about ourselves aside and have put our entire focus on who we are serving.