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I do miss home from time to time. I think about the friends I used to hang out with, the foods I used to eat, driving my car around with the windows down and the AC on, and mainly just being comfortable having a full-time paying job. I suppose I could make that list go on and on, and like any volunteer overseas, I sometimes marvel at the smallness of my room, the few possessions I have, and say to myself, "Wow I've given up a lot to be here."

I met an Angel when I was working in Los Alcarizos, Santo Domingo a week and a half ago. Yes, it's capitalized and it's a proper name because he's pictured here, standing on the left. I could have easily started a paragraph with "I've talked with

Jesus just about everywhere in this country," and that's also true on a few levels. Anyway, Angel is a pastor, a father of three, and a mainstay at the school "Colegio Lubrera de Caballona" for the past three years with his team of dedicated teachers and administrators.



(The team of administrators.)

Angel has over 25 years of experience running logistics and managing operations for other not-for-profit organizations in this country, but he's here at this school working with about 50 students that didn't fit in at other schools. For reasons like lack of discipline or learning disabilities their parents have sent their children here. Angel tells me, "When you see the necessity of the community, how can you not be involved?"



(The surrounding community.)

record. In some ways, she doesn't "need to be here" either and certainly she could make a lot more money working at another school. Surely, there'd be better benefits, insurance, and opportunities for an annual salary raise. But "It's worth it," she tells me "because we have the ability to transform these children by helping them to learn, to grow, and to prepare them for the future."

I look over and Chanel is playing basketball with the boys. He's 19, well-spoken, full of energy, and is currently disciplining a young man who is not playing fairly. "We enforce the discipline here because we love them, and I know that to them, that's a strange concept, but without rules they don't grow, they'll never make the right decisions." I wonder why Chanel (yes, it's the same name of the perfume) is spending

Standing next to Angel is Lucila, she's the director of the school, and she's got an equally impressive professional track



(Boys playing basketball.)

his time here. He's got just about every option available to him right now in his life. But he's here, present with the children, teaching them about life when it seems it's just about basketball.



(An Esperanza loan officer.)

I've met a few of our Esperanza loan officers over the past year that have told me they've turned down better paying jobs because they feel called to be here, working in these communities, being a part of someone's life, sharing from the Bible, assisting with someone's transformation from economic poverty to self-sustainability and onto profitability. They ask me, "Where else would I have this opportunity?"

It's like they're standing in front of two doors with glass panes. Inside one they see there's an air conditioner perched above just one large desk, in the corner sits a water cooler with ready plastic cups, a comfortable chair that adjusts, a nice laptop

that was manufactured within the past two years, a bowl of fruit and plenty of natural light streaming in. Looking through the other glass pane, they see the opposite on every level, and it contains three more desks in the same space. Strangely, they choose the latter. Why?

They have all given up a lot to be here. In strictly utilitarian terms, they've given up a tremendous amount, and certainly, five or ten times more than I have, and this is the thing that hits me: **they've given up more than I will ever have to give up.**

To pick just one tiny example, the small bathroom that I share with another roommate has hot water. The people I just mentioned, always take cold showers. Always. There is no hot water. They probably will not have hot water anytime soon, or maybe even ever. The building where I live, strangely, has internet. The only way to check email is to walk to a local internet center for most of these people.



(One of their students.)



(The kids that they love.)

I'd like to think I'm getting more mature, and to that end I'd like to be very clear right now: **this is not an opportunity for me nor for you to feel guilty.** This is not a game of us and them tallying up our spiritual disciplines or accomplishments, nor of erasing our board completely. I simply want to say that we should all be inspired again by these verses:

"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.

Each day has enough trouble of its own." Matthew 6:31-34

What I have seen in each one of these people is: *they have simply given up a few things to make room for others* . I see joy, and patience, and willingness to open their hearts and to really be present with someone and really take the risks to love. I'm a firm believer that we can only carry so much with the two hands we've been given.

We must always give up to receive. When I take a step back and look at the tremendous amount of blessings, relationships, and joys I have received since I've left it's actually quite clear to me now: I've been thinking that this was an unbalanced equation. It is, but I was looking at it from the wrong side. I haven't given up much at all. No, I've been given so much. So much more than I could have ever imagined. As I step back and look at my experience here, I'm speechless.

I pray that God would give us eyes to see what we can give up, and that we would give without expectation, and take joy in what we receive.

Bendiciones,
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(Chanel, and his boys.)

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