

Ireland Reflection

West Valley Presbyterian Church

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So I had known for a while that I was going to have to do a presentation about my time in Ireland by Matt. That was sometime in March. However, it was last Sunday that I found out that I was doing it this Sunday by Kim. Right there, as I was working lights. And it was this past Tuesday that I learned that what we had previously discussed for the message was being replaced for the format we are using today. But I wasn't stressed, I wasn't nervous or anxious. I had faith that I was going to say exactly what I was supposed to say. I was willing to take a risk of standing in front of you guys. But I was okay with that risk. I had been taking them all summer.

I started my journey in Wisconsin at training camp. All I had when I landed was a 31 pound cardboard box of all my stuff for the summer and a backpack. For the next two weeks my team and over 10 other teams, over 200 people altogether, slept in tents. We had a daily routine that consisted of team building obstacle courses, teachings, bible studies, quiet time with the Lord and worship. We also took lessons in various skill groups. We participated in 3 groups. Dance, drama or skits, and puppets. I was a puppeteer along with Gina. All the groups were designed to draw people in so that we may share the Gospel with them on the street.

I was part of the team's Staff Disciplers, basically youth advisors for the teenagers. We had 2 – 3 kids in our groups that we spent every minute of the day with. My group of boys, Myles, David, and Ethan were called the Quatros Amigos.

Our ministry started in Londonderry/Derry, a town in Northern Ireland that was once riddled with conflict between the Catholics and Protestants that reached its breaking point in a terrible event called Bloody Sunday. The

pain of the past still resonated with the people but there has since been efforts to mend the relationship between the Catholics and the Protestants. We stayed at Ebrington Presbyterian Church and partnered with them to do ministry within the church and in the community. We did 4 things with our time in Londonderry. We participated in an evening Holiday Club or VBS. We helped with a special 4-part evening youth group for kids in the community and in the church. We did street ministry and spread the Gospel on the streets and we also put on a moms group called Tiddlers, where preschool children played in a room similar to McHattie Hall while the teenagers in our group discussed their faith with the moms over tea. Now here is a few gratuitous pictures of cute Irish children. Most of my street ministry was working with children while groups of teenagers from our team talked to people on the streets and presented the Gospel.

Our second stop was in the coastal beach town of Portrush. Imagine Santa Cruz and that would be a pretty good representation of this town. We connected with a group of surfers that had recently started a new venture called The Surf Project, they aimed to make church relevant in their culture and country and to break down barriers and preconceptions people may have towards God and the Church. They were doing all of this while teaching kids to surf and putting on surf camps. We participated with their ministry by being guinea pigs and joining one of their surf camps. During our time doing street ministry, we also spread the word about a free BBQ The Surf Project was sponsoring at the local Methodist Church. An event that garnered over 200 visitors. All of our students were busy serving the community with food and fun all while sharing Gospel.

Our last stop of the trip was in a small town in Southern Ireland called Skerries. We stayed in an international elementary school and joined a Methodist Church that was no bigger than the Narthex. While in Skerries we were tasked with putting on a Holiday Club completely on our own. We had no supplies. No kids, only 5 kids had signed up, and no time. We had 4 hours to create a craft, create a curriculum, figure out games, songs, and scripture. But God is good and He will provide. Within that time we had everything figured out. Parents brought snacks throughout the week, we created crafts that used supplies we already had, pencils, paper plates,

duct tape, blood, sweat, tears. We had scripture, a fun theme, and songs. During the week the number of kids grew from 15 on the first day to 40 by that Friday. It was a far different story than how do VBS here. With months of preparation, a budget more than \$15, and over 150 kids but again God is good. And will make Himself known. We put on another BBQ that we publicized only a few days in advance while we did street ministry in Skerries. Nearly 100 teenagers came to the BBQ and were presented the Gospel by the students and in a performance the drama team put on.

Our team was from across the country, from different denominations but we shared a common thread: A relationship with Jesus Christ. We also shared a common goal: spreading the Gospel to people who are in desperate need of hearing it. But that goal took many of the teenagers out of their comfort zones. It took me out of my comfort zone. Our hearts were stretched in amazing and sometimes uncomfortable ways during the trip. We took a risk every moment we walked up to a stranger on the street. And God lead us by the hand.

We took a risk the moment we decided to go on this trip. God had put this opportunity in front of us and we felt compelled to take it. God had put this idea in our heads and our hearts to go. We just yielded to Him. We trusted that God would prepare our hearts for ministry in a foreign land, away from our families, friends, and loved ones for 6 weeks.

You see I've found that risk requires faith in God. Risk requires trust in God. It must have our complete surrender to God. Giving up our plans for His. Knowing that He will do what is best. Maybe not our idea for what is best for us...But His idea for what is best for His glory. It requires us to not put a limit on what God could do.

It made me step out of my comfort zone. In my risk taking, in my trust, and my faith, I saw God do amazing things. His glory was shone. His power was visible. His will was done. And I was immensely blessed. Along the trip

the theme of trust and risk was made evident at every step of our journey in Ireland. Like in Londonderry/Derry where we taught kids at the Holiday Club from the Book of Daniel.

About Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and how they said this to Nebuchadnezzar when they were asked if their God was going to save them from the fiery furnace.

“Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. Daniel 3:16 – 18

They handed the outcome to God, whether it was good or bad. I always found that so amazing. If they survived It was going to glorify God if they died it would bring glory to God. I had no idea what God was going to do this summer. But I knew that whatever happened was going to bring Him glory.

I knew that as I took a risk and presented the Gospel to people on the streets the results would be up to God. Now sometimes people weren't receptive to the Gospel. This was true for one group in our team who were verbally harassed while trying to share the gospel with a woman. We were not promised success every time. We had to leave the results up to God. We read in one of our daily bible studies:

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. (1 Peter 4:12 – 14)

How true that became to our teenagers that day.

The outcome was always the same when we presented the Gospel.

They would say yes to the Lord.

We would plant a seed.

Or our message would be rejected.

It was that simple.

Now you may have noticed that I haven't quite touched on the amount of people that were saved or made decisions to follow Christ on my trip.

I personally don't like to focus on "numbers", because doing God's work is not summed up simply in the harvest. Sure, we want to see people make decisions to become followers of Jesus Christ and to give their lives to Him but as in farming, the soil needs to be broken and tilled before a seed can be planted. Then the seed needs water and time before it can spring forth into a plant and then harvested. Ireland is some tough soil. We heard that people were making decisions to have a relationship with Christ by the truck full by teams in China and Sierra Leone. And I pray that they were sincere commitments. But when you are in a post-Christian land riddled with apathy towards Christ and God and Christianity in general it's difficult to see any results. But we are called, not to see results, but to be faithful to do the work He has given us to do, whether it is plowing, planting, watering, or harvesting. We took a risk every day when we would walk up to people on the streets and present the Gospel.

What is God calling you to risk? He is calling for each of us to risk something for Him.

Is it your reputation?

Do you choose to not speak to people about your faith at work? Or with your non-Christian friends?

Is it your savings?

By giving more freely to His causes. By sharing with the needy or less fortunate.

Is it your service to God?

Maybe leading a small group or volunteering for something that might be out of your comfort zone.

Maybe it's your willingness to put him before yourself. Maybe showing up for service worship if you've never went before.

Or maybe it's a mission trip. Maybe its not one for 6 weekes like mine but maybe its giving up a week of your life for Jesus in Mexico. Serving in Rancho Santa Marta.

Is it taking a risk in how you live your life? By giving him more of you. By reading the Bible daily. By doing ridiculous things for His purposes. Like speaking up about what you do Sundays

I don't know what it is! God does though. And I'm pretty sure you do as well.

Matthew 14:6