

My parents pushed for me to start attending youth group my freshman year and I couldn't be happier they did. I instantly became friends with people who I would normally never see at school or even talk to, which I think is what makes youth group so special. It enables you to make connections with other high schoolers in a different element other than school.

Throughout the first couple weeks of attending youth group, I noticed that work trip was always being brought up. My brother who was a senior at the time had told me how awesome the experience was, but I wasn't sure if he was just saying this to make sure I came, or if he was really telling me the truth. Months flew by in my freshman year and the next thing I knew, it was summer. I had made it through the stress of finals and before I could celebrate 3 months off from school, I was being loaded onto a white van with other youth group members whom I didn't know that well. The leaders had told us to not use our phones or listen to music with headphones during the 7 hours bus ride, which was not something I mentally prepared for. Fortunately I survived those 7 hours without my phone and ended up having the most amazing time of my summer. I was able to spend my first work trip with my brother and mom, which was a once and a lifetime experience. Having my family on the trip with me made every moment even more valuable, especially because my brother would be leaving for college soon.

And now we fast forward to my sophomore, where I felt comfortable and at home during youth group and retreats. And when the next work trip was arriving, it was something that I couldn't miss. I knew that this work trip wouldn't be the same as my last because my brother and mom wouldn't be there with me, but everyone at youth group had become a new family to me. This year we went to Lebanon Junction Kentucky, where we accomplished incredible things that brought all of us closer. We accomplished working through the heat while painting and staining. Working on a roof and for some people, getting over the fear of heights. Learning how to safely smash out a window, replace the window and make a handmade frame. We built stairs for porch, and were able to see the impact we had on each homeowner. Their smiles and energy at the end of the day were priceless and reassured me that what we were doing was making an impact. Nothing can compare to their gratefulness towards us, which is a constant reminder that a little hard work and dedication can go a long way.

Work Trip is a time where you can truly be yourself, and where the only worry is if the food would be edible that night. It's a week of hard work, fun and new friends. And although we struggled through heat, many bugs and 6 hours at Lowes, everything made it worth it.

Work Trip Reflections/Lebanon Junction, KY
2 Corinthians 4: 5-9

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I've been doing service trips with the church since middle school, when I went on the mission trips down to Chicago. Now I look forward all year to the time when Work Trip comes around, and this year I was even fortunate enough to have my good friend Alec Brandel join me. My favorite part about these trips is and always has been the people we help. In Chicago it was usually homeless people or people struggling with their everyday lives, while in Rocky Mount, Roscommon, and Lebanon Junction it is just good people who don't have a lot that just need some help. Two of these people, two homeowners, really stood out to me in Lebanon Junction.

The first homeowner was a man named Bill. Bill had worked on an assembly line with Ford for over 30 years, which had given him a bad back, making it hard for him to keep up the outside of his house. When we got the chance, Alec and I sat down with Bill for a little while and got to know him more. He told us that he had worked at the Ford plant for a few years on the assembly, but they then laid a lot of people off and he didn't know what he would do. Soon after he found a job on an assembly line at a GE plant for worse pay. Eventually, however, another job opened up at the same Ford plant and he took it without hesitation, and he worked there until the day he retired. After that we began to talk about pollution, and Alec told him a little about the pollution he had seen in China while he was there.

One thing Alec and I learned was that Bill had been an avid hunter, and still hunts when he can. Since I lived in central Michigan for the first eight years of my life, and my dad was an avid hunter, I was able to talk to him about that. Bill loved duck hunting, and he still enjoys it, he said it's easy for him to do with his bad back. I told him how my dad loved to hunt with a bow and was really good at it, and Bill said he respects people who bowhunt, since it can be difficult and takes patience and skill. Bill was kind of shy when we first arrived, but by the time we were getting ready to leave he was cracking jokes and talking to all of us and having a good time. Unfortunately, we were the last work crew to visit his site and he was sad to see us leave. Before we left, he told me I should bring my dad down sometime and he would take us hunting, I thanked him and told him I would love that

The other homeowner was a woman named Patty, who lived with her husband. I unfortunately was not able to meet her husband, but I had heard he was as kind as her, which is a good thing. While we were working at her home Patty did something very kind, something I had heard she had been doing for every work crew that came to her house each day - she made us sweet tea. That alone would have been good enough, but she didn't stop there, on top of the sweet tea she also made sure to bake something for each crew at her house as well, one day was cookies, another was brownies.

I went into her kitchen to compliment her sweet tea, since I have always loved tea but never sweet tea until then, and she took a tray of brownies out of the oven. She then started to tell me and John Norkus that she had to run to the store really quickly, because another work crew had shown up after they

finished at their site and there weren't enough brownies for them too, so she wanted to make sure she baked enough for everyone there. She then told John and I we could each sneak a brownie really quickly as long as we didn't tell anyone, which was a fair deal. She never had to make us the sweet tea or the brownies, but she did anyway. She did because it was how she could give back to us, and her efforts to give back to us amazed me, her hospitality and kindness amazed me.

At the end of the day, she came outside to everyone working at that site and gave us each a laminated four leaf clover, she said she had a lot of them and wanted to give us them as a gift. I keep that clover in my wallet not for good luck, but as a reminder of Patty, and Bill, and all of the other homeowners, and just as a reminder that there are kind people in the world, so I remember to treat people with kindness.

Hello everyone I'm Elijah. I'm a sophomore in High School and this was my first time going on work trip. Going into work trip this year, I was excited. I was excited because out of every single person I talked to who had been, I heard nothing but good things. So I was ready to find out what was so great and what people loved about it. Well, I would soon discover that it truly is an amazing experience.

Meeting the homeowners and learning their stories is something I enjoyed the most. I learned so many interesting things about the local people of Lebanon Junction and what they're like. Even better is the look of joy on their face when they see how we've improved their homes and made living easier for them.

On my first day, I worked on Denver and Patty Young's house. Patty was very grateful to have us there, and loved to talk to us. When Denver came home, he actually helped us do our job. He and I took down an entire metal structure together. While doing this, he told me all about himself. I learned about his son, who grew up to be an architect and still lives in Kentucky. He also showed me his functioning bulldozer that he built from scratch, and his love of jeeps. Learning all about this man that I had just met that day and seeing how content he was with his humble life was an eye opening experience. He and I live very different lives, yet we were able to really connect to one another.

On top of all that, Work Trip is a time where you connect to your peers and really get to know them. I spent all year getting to know them at youth group, and when I went on work trip, I just felt like everyone there was my friend. I'm so glad I went this year, after seeing my brother and sister leave for work trip the last few years, I knew it was something I would one day do. And now, I'm psyched that I have three more work trips ahead. Thank you.