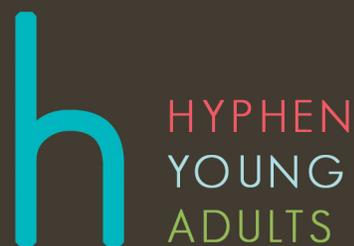


AYCSA: MY GREAT ADVENTURE

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Since 1997, approximately 3,609 young people have experienced the great adventure of an Apostolic Youth Corps missions trip. Last year I had the privilege of being a part of the largest year for AYC on record when I attended the AYC South Africa trip. Of the nearly 650 teenagers and young adults who attended an AYC trip in 2016, about forty of us met in New York City and flew for fifteen hours and almost 8,000 miles to the city of Johannesburg, South Africa, a place none of us had ever been. And none of us had any idea what we were getting into. It was a young group, the average age being about twenty years old, and only a small handful of us had ever been out of the country before, much less on any kind of missions trip. Both sets of chaperones were leading their first AYC trip, and the missionaries that were slated to lead us around the country hadn't been stationed in South Africa for years.

On paper this didn't seem like the ideal way to travel, but fortunately our group was awesome. I'm not saying we didn't have any mishaps or that no one ever got on my nerves or that there wasn't one guy who made really loud bird calls on the bus at all hours of the day or night. (Many nights I thanked God we had an odd number of guys so that I lucked out with my own room.) But all things considered (and there were a lot of things to consider), everyone was amazing. People treated each other with kindness and respect, tried to involve each other in all the fun, and generally tried to get along with one another. If someone had an issue, someone else took care of it, and not just the chaperones either, although they were great. The older members of the tour looked after everyone else, making sure everyone had enough money or food, etc., and the younger ones made sure that everyone was having fun. Faults were overlooked, talents were applauded, and successes were celebrated. I know it sounds cliché, but it really was like a big family.

The secret to our group's success was attitude. You could feel it as soon as we met in the international terminal at JFK, and it lasted until we returned home. Everyone had an attitude of expectation. The people on this trip were expecting to have a wonderful time, and so many people did. Everyone was generally in a good mood because everyone *wanted* to be in a good mood. We all got along because we *wanted* to get along. At first I was surprised by how incredible everyone's attitude was, especially some of the younger members of our group who had never been away from home. But now I realize I shouldn't have been surprised at all; no one spends \$4000 and flies 10,000 unless they really want to be there. It wasn't a rag-tag gang of kids; it was a group of hard-working young people who wanted to do something for the kingdom of God.

Our attitude of expectation extended into our missionary efforts. We were expecting to be successful, and when people are expecting success, they will put in the work it takes to make that expectation a reality. Everyone worked hard, whether it was unloading suitcases, taking pictures for the social media page, rehearsing music for street service, or passing out tracts. Anytime there was even a hint of a move of God, everyone buckled down and prayed hard, seeking the face of God earnestly. This happened in our devotions, in our pray meetings, our services, and just about everywhere we went. We also attacked the outreach with particular enthusiasm, talking to strangers, passing out tracts to random



people on the road, and praying for people we had never seen before. God did not disappoint us. He showed up and made His presence known in a mighty way throughout the trip. In total, we were involved in two Sunday services, one youth service, and one outdoor service, as well as multiple prayer meetings, devotionals, and spontaneous prayer/worship sessions in two different cities. In each of them, people were filled with the Holy Spirit, miracles took place, lives were changed, and relationships were healed. There were brand-new visitors, people that had been away for many years, and faithful old saints who were changed by the power of God. Just as we had come expecting something powerful to happen, the local church members also came with an intense spirit of expectancy. Many times great worship or pray services broke out

during the regular services, and God was able to work amongst the people. During our stay, at least forty-three people were filled with the Holy Spirit, nine were baptized, and many received healings and other miracles.

But the South Africans weren't the only ones to be touched by the presence of God. In the Johannesburg airport terminal as we waited for our flight home, our group had a chance to sit down together and talk about how we had been changed during the trip. I listened as nearly every member of the group testified of how God had opened their eyes to His kingdom or had delivered them from some physical or spiritual ailment. Many told us they felt that God had given them a new burden for missionary work or had given them a new desire to be involved in ministry in their home church. Many spoke of burdens that had been lifted, or of oppositions they had encountered during their struggle to pay for the trip, or how God had silenced their doubts by making a way for them to attend. By the end, there weren't many dry eyes or untouched hearts, a sign of the vulnerability and passion of each member of our trip. Every person who had gone looking for something had been fulfilled. We had shown God our desire to draw closer to Him by taking a leap of faith, and He in His unfailing grace had drawn closer to us.

So this basically has turned into an article about the *people* of the AYC South Africa trip instead of what we did on the trip. But so what? Yes, we got to do a lot of cool things on the trip. Did we go on safaris? Yes. Did we get to pet giraffes and cheetahs? Yes. Did we almost die on a dirt road in the middle of the bushveld in an encounter with a bull elephant because we came between him and his mate? Maybe. But despite how cool those experiences were, the things that were most important and will stay with me the longest were the encounters I had with the people in South Africa, both those that were native and those who, like me, had traveled thousands of miles to be there. It's possible that I may never see any of them again, but I suspect that won't be the case.

Paul wrote in I Corinthians 1:25, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men." I'd say that running off to a country where you've never been, with people you've never met, to do things you've never done before is pretty crazy. But that's exactly what AYC trips are: crazy. I hope and pray that 3,600 more young people make the crazy choice to run off on an AYC adventure in the coming years.