

In His Perfect Time, He Restores

Princeton, Kentucky – HEART Mission Trip – September 19 – 24, 2022

I've often been told that everything is done in His time... and His timing is perfect. That couldn't have proven to be more true than during a week-long mission trip to Kentucky in mid-September.

A group of ten people, some of whom I had only met once before, gathered in the Hosanna Church parking lot before sunrise on a Monday morning. Three pickup trucks were being loaded with luggage and supplies, destinations were being set in GPS systems and relative strangers were taking their places in the vehicles headed out for a 12-hour long drive. His timing? We all got to watch the sunrise as we headed down the freeway. Surprisingly, the 12-hour drive went by quickly. The passengers in each vehicle soon became team members, brothers and sisters in Christ. We were willing to share our lives for the next week as we all looked forward to being used by the Creator of the Universe; the one who had known from the beginning of time the ten of us would be serving Him together. When we stopped for gas, I learned about the wide variety of conversations taking place in the vehicles – the conversations that were beginning to bind us together. There was talk about interpreting dreams, military experiences, overcoming addictions, seminary and other mission trip experiences, and golf cart church. During the lull in the conversations, it was apparent we were becoming a family, because, well, some of us napped during the drive.

We had been given a general idea of what to expect when we arrived in Princeton, KY.... But as is the case with mission trips and His plans; our plans were changed. We headed straight to supper at Highland Baptist Church. We would be dining there every night with the other volunteer crews that we would be working alongside that week. Each night, as we entered the church's fellowship hall, we couldn't miss the buzz of excitement from the many round tables of volunteers, from the church ladies as they prepared to serve our meals, and from the church and community leaders overseeing the activities. Nor could we overlook the tables against the far wall laden with food.

Supper was brought in each night by a different church group in the area. The main courses included fried chicken, Ms. Piggy's BBQ, Italian casseroles, taco casseroles and Texas smoked brisket. The ladies from each church were delighted to tell us which was their best and favorite side dish or dessert and who prepared them. The made meals not only replenished our bodies, but there was also something about the church food and the fellowship hall setting that seemed to replenish our souls as well. The ladies were the quiet servants, making sure there was plenty of food and desserts, everyone had beverages, and the tables were cleared. I had the opportunity to connect with one of these servants. It was certainly a God appointment as we had many similar experiences in life. We know that because of Christ, we are new creations; doing things His way and learning that His timing is perfect, and worth the wait. I

may never see that sister in Christ again, but she made an impact on my life; providing encouragement and helping me trust His timing in my life.

Before sunrise each day, our team gathered for breakfast in one of the two nearly unfurnished mobile homes we stayed in. After breakfast, we'd begin the day, making sandwiches for lunch, learning our assignments, having devotions and asking for His protection, direction, and blessing on our day. One morning, we served each other communion. Serving and receiving communion to/from my teammate nearly brought me to tears – it was a moving experience for me.

Our HEART team worked alongside three other ministry teams throughout the week: Hope Force International from Brentwood, TN, Wings of Promise from Orange, TX and Dean and his sons and crew (what was the name of his ministry and where were they from? Were they from HR Ministries?). Combined, our teams consisted of 20+ volunteers. While we were building relationships with the members of our own HEART team, we were also privileged to work alongside, and build relationships with, the members of these other teams. Each one of us stepped away from our “normal” lives to serve the God who restores. We were helping Him restore the lives of the victims of a tornado that hit just before Christmas in 2021. The tornado was on the ground for nearly 100 miles and was two to three miles wide. Over the course of 5 days, our combined teams built three new homes for tornado survivors. These homes began as a bare concrete foundation with prefabricated interior and exterior walls and rafters stacked on the ground off to the side. At the end of the week, there were 3 homes with interior walls defining bedrooms, kitchen, and laundry areas, shingled roofs and installed windows and doors. One of the homes was being sided as we left. These homes provide hope and a future for the tornado victims.

Like our group, some of their team members were skilled craftsmen, and others had little skill or experience, but everyone was willing to do whatever work was asked of them. As one of two women in the teams, I was one of the less experienced, less skilled workers; but I was not alone. The more experienced members of the teams were patient, encouraging, thoughtful and forgiving as they instructed and guided me. During the week, I learned to use a nail gun, a circle saw, a sawsall and a staple gun. I learned to assemble and stand exterior and interior walls, install windows and doors, and hang Tyvek and siding while standing on scaffolding. I could've climbed up on the roof to lay roofing shingles but chickened out. Those more experienced, seasoned workers encouraged, but didn't insist I do something I wasn't comfortable doing. There was no shame in admitting I didn't know how to do something, or that I made a mistake or that I was afraid. As a woman working among so many skilled men, I didn't feel weak or “less than.” I was treated with respect and therefore felt empowered to take on new tasks. I may not be a master craftsman or an expert, but I can now say I have experience working on a construction site. That wasn't my only reward – I was given my own tool belt!!

There were times we were challenged during the week. Satan tried to discourage and distract us – but our prayers for protection were answered. Oh my, the weather those first two days

was tough!! The temperature was 102 degrees and 100 degrees. Many of our team members felt the effects of the heat. Over the course of the first day, we were taking more and more breaks, drinking more and more water, and slowing down to fight off heat exhaustion – some less successfully than others. Then, we were blessed with cooler days for the remainder of the week. There was confusion the first day about reading the plans and how to assemble the prefabricated walls. We stopped everything we were doing and asked Jesus, a carpenter Himself, to give us His wisdom and discernment. Not ten minutes later, the answer presented itself. Unfortunately, one member of our team was injured. A quick prayer was offered as the injured man and two teammates went to the emergency room. The prayer was a reminder that “He works all things to the good” and that this accident would be used to spread His word. Not surprisingly, the team members had opportunities to witness at the hospital while waiting for five stitches in the scalp and MRI results. Satan also attacked me personally. He knows exactly what bait to use – an offhand comment made in fun by a teammate became the cause of a brief spiritual battle. Fortunately, prayer showed me His truth and Satan’s attack became a blessing. Despite Satan’s attempts, Jesus’ timing was not deterred and there was physical and spiritual restoration.

The most rewarding part of the trip was meeting two of the families who would be moving into these homes when they are complete – It is their lives that are being restored. Steve and Sallie were in the root cellar when the tornado demolished their home and tossed their sheds across their property. They know their lives were spared for a reason. They are active members of the community distributing food and household items to those in need. Sallie refers to the team members who began building their new home as a “group of angels.” Their home will have a lower level facing the wooded area out back and a front porch that faces the sunset. Wherever they look, they will be reminded of His glory every day.

Todd was asleep when he received a phone call warning him the tornado was approaching. He barely made it the hallway of his home before the tornado struck. It brought tree down into his children’s bedroom. Fortunately, Todd’s children were out of town that night. Todd knows God protected him, and his children that night. He mourns the loss of his home – it was his grandparent’s legacy to him. However, as much as he loved the home, the old house required a lot of work, time, and money – all of which were a burden as he raises his three children. He sees the new home as a blessing because it will not require the work and upkeep that would take time away from his kids. Todd’s purpose is to continue putting smiles on the residents of the nursing home where he works. He hadn’t been attending church; but was invited by one of the church ladies to attend with his children. Our group presented him with a Bible; just in case he didn’t have one.

Our evenings were full. After supper each night, we all went back to our mobile home to unpack our day. Each day was like unpeeling an onion – layer upon layer of His presence, His activity. We’d be amazed at the amount of grace the other teams’ members displayed as we worked alongside each other. We’d recall a “sword fight” with pool noodles. We would congratulate someone for stepping out of their comfort zone. Preparing to be offsite for the afternoon, the HEART team leaders showed their confidence and trust in us by putting the

ladies “in charge” and another team member took the lead on the siding. We talked about how hot it was the first day and how to combat the heat the next day. We laughed at how the youngest volunteers ate three sandwiches for lunch. We were sad when Rooster lost his helicopter in the woods. We delighted in the seeing Christ at work in the midst of the distraction of an unexpected injury. We relayed snippets of conversation with Steve and Sallie or with Todd. One of us enjoyed the stray cats and the goats. Another of us referred to the cockroaches as our “little friends.” One of us got into the wrong truck after supper one night. One night, after about a half hour of unpacking the day, we realized that day started with communion. So much had happened in the day, we almost forgot the blessing of the beginning of the day. It was during these times, as well as working on the job site, that our team grew closer and closer. We became a cord of 11 strands – we will not be easily broken.

It has been three full weeks since our trip. The first week was hardest. God’s presence was so powerful, tangible almost, while I was in Kentucky. I was on a spiritual and emotional high every day because I could see Him at work, I knew He was working in me and through me. I knew beyond a doubt I was where I was supposed to be doing what He wanted me to be doing. I know He is still here alongside me, but He seems to have receded into the background. I’m not surrounded by my HEART team every day and am not recounting where I saw God at work each day. The work I did was hard, but so rewarding. I knew I was being obedient to Him and His calling on my time. Now I sit at my desk creating seemingly meaningless spreadsheets and PowerPoint presentations. I know I should do all things as for Christ... but it is so hard. I’ve been looking for more ways to volunteer at HEART. I’ve committed to myself that I’d work on maintaining the relationships I’ve developed with my HEART team members. I’ve even investigated retiring early so I could have more flexibility in my schedule to serve Him more. I’ve watched Hope Force go to Florida and help restore homes and security after Ian. I know that in His perfect timing, He will restore that spiritual high. He will show me again where and how I should serve Him. He will provide the way for me. I believe He has a purpose behind my time in Kentucky; and in His perfect time, He will reveal it to me. Until then, I pray He gives me eyes to see Him at work, ears to hear Him speak to me, faith to trust Him, courage to be obedient, and peace to wait on His timing.