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Regardless. That’s the best word I can use to describe our study abroad trip to Jamaica this past Christmas. I’m sure I will continue to process everything that we experienced, but for now, the word I would choose to describe this trip would be the word “regardless.” Many of the things that took place on this trip I feel relate to that word. Whether it was being flexible in our plans and lessons, bearing through long days and hot weather, being unfamiliar with the food or culture, the Mayor who was supposed to speak to us one night not ever showing up, teaching in noisy and intimidating classrooms, having only a few hours at Margaritaville for our fun day—or even inspiring the teachers at Vere Technical high school where we taught to push on in believing in their students desires to learn. In other instances, through challenging myself to not give up on a difficult student or also when there was that one day of stress because of delayed and messed up flights—regardless—we came to teach and to serve, and I honestly believe we succeeded in doing just that on this trip. Without God’s hand completely empowering and equipping us, we would have never been able to remain flexible in the midst of these things.
There are a lot of fantastic things about Liberty. Between the various programs and majors offered, to the extracurricular, to the emphasis on spiritual truths being incorporated into daily education, Liberty truly has it all from a Christian education standpoint. One of the main ways Liberty excels in this area is through its study abroad and global academic trips offered to students.

The Education Department for the past several years has taken a group of education students to Jamaica for a week-long “study abroad” experience. However, the rewards are so much more than just class credit. Not only do students gain classroom experience in a foreign environment, but they are blessed to serve as well. A phrase that the students wore on their shirts the first day stated, “To teach, to serve.” Liberty realizes that training prospective educators is the main purpose for the trip. But as Christians, there is a role that teachers play that goes far deeper. Opportunities are presented to make the Gospel known, and at the bottom line, this is the most important motivation for us.

My experience on the Jamaica trip could not have been better. The Lord taught my teammates as well as myself the countless reasons why we do what we do. The trip required a lot from each of us; whether it was flexibility, perseverance, joy, or simply trust in His calling. By stretching us out of our comfort zones, the experience only caused us to grow closer to Him and together as a team. We were able to encourage others and more importantly, be ambassadors of life and hope to schools that felt
they had lost that fire. Not only that, but we were able to tangibly leave a mark on the community in Jamaica by donating all of our lesson materials to the schools, giving supplies that we had brought for them, or blessing a local foster home with toys, games, and our time. We even joined in gathering on Wednesday night with a local church nearby for their weekly Bible study. I was blown away and humbled by the fact that though we live across the globe from each other, it was so cool to see how we could experience community with these brothers and sisters in Christ because of the fact that serving the same Lord unified us. What a perspective to gain by being able to edify and be refreshed in return by believers from an entirely different culture.

One of the highlights of my week was when I had the opportunity to not only influence the students through teaching an art lesson, but the teachers as well! Right before I went to teach my first art lesson of the day, Ms. McLoed (one of the 5th grade teachers) approached me and asked if I was preparing to teach an art lesson. She proceeded to tell me how she used to love to do art a long time ago before she had to stop for lack of resources. I offered for her to do a project with the students since I had brought enough supplies, and watching her face light up was priceless! She was like a little kid again, and at the end of class when I had students come up to show their work, I called her up separately and told the class that they had a fine art teacher on their hands that they probably didn’t know about. Being able to give her a chance to be a “student” was unreal, and it made me realize just how grateful I am for teachers and all the work they do that is often underappreciated and goes unnoticed.

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There are many times we as students doubt our capabilities or even ourselves. We give in to this “culture of scarcity” and hearts of comparison. We might even question why we chose what we did or wonder how we will ever make ends meet. But more than ever I learned on this trip that not only does nothing happen for no reason when we have the God we do, but that regardless He will use us if we are willing. The Lord confirmed in each of us why we felt teaching was where He had us to be, but not only that, we realized how much further the Lord takes a career title when you dedicate it back to Him.

Honors student—whoever or wherever you are, in whatever you do, regardless of your situation or how equipped you feel—trust the Lord of your calling over your current condition. Remember that you will often have doubts (we all do), where we are tempted to give in to comparison or stress. But never forget that in the midst of it all, God remains faithful. “He does not call the equipped but rather He equips the called,” so rest easy knowing the responsibility for the provision and timing is not in your hands, but rather stays fixed in the arms of the fully capable Giver of all your abilities and the source of your joy. In everything, seek to give Him glory, because all He asks for is a willing heart and faith in His sovereignty and He will get you there regardless.