

# The Missing "Peace"



# Impact Houston Mission Trip 2015





## Houston Team Members

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## Thank You Netherwood!

"Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ." Philemon 1:20

Although many of you were not able to physically join us in the work at Impact Church of Christ this past summer, we as representatives of Netherwood Park Church of Christ took you with us because of your support for us through your prayers, encouragement, and monetary donations. We cannot begin to express to you how much our gratitude is overflowing for the love of the saints here at Netherwood who have continued to partner with us as we serve in inner city Houston. We hope and pray that you are able to see incredible glimpses of how our fellow brothers and sisters in Houston are benefiting from you in the Lord and are having their hearts refreshed because of your generosity.

As the youth minister here at Netherwood, I cannot adequately communicate the blessing from above that it is to witness our young people and adult sponsors (myself included) be further transformed into the image of Christ because of our privilege to spend a few days in Houston. On behalf of all of the Houston team members, we want you to know how much we love you and how much we sincerely thank you for all the support that you have given to us. We ask that you continue to partner with us here in Albuquerque as we seek to live out God's calling for the specific contexts in which God has placed us. We ask for your prayers and for you to hold us accountable in living poured out lives for God!

With Christ's Love,

Anthony Favors

# Anthony Favors

As I go to Impact Houston year after year, I lose track of the numbers of times that I have been blessed to go. What I will never lose track of are the things that God teaches me through the experiences that I have, the people that I interact with and the things that God allows me to see. While words simply do not do justice to what God teaches me through the Impact Church of Christ, here's a little about the amazing and convicting lessons that I am trying to live out here in Albuquerque.

Serving God is not about me being comfortable or sitting in a church building on a Sunday morning or Wednesday night. Serving God is about me daily following Jesus where He leads and oftentimes, He leads me through places and experiences that are extremely uncomfortable and difficult to exalt His name and build His kingdom.

I oftentimes am not first asking myself the question, "Who can I serve?"

My prayers have the ability to move the heart and mind of God to action and to literally silence the heavens as the Creator of the universe listens to His beloved, me!

I want so much more of God's transformation in my own life and in the lives of my brothers and sisters in Christ and most certainly in the lives of those who don't know Jesus.

Church should be a safe and loving place to fail and be held accountable.

I literally have NO excuses for why I am not daily living a poured out life in the name of and for the sake of Jesus Christ.





# Luis Loredó

First of all I find it so difficult to express into words the thoughts, experiences and emotions that come to my heart and mind as I think about writing about the week that we had at Houston. I still haven't really shared with anybody the full experience of Houston. It comes out little by little once in a while. I fell in love with the kids and people at Houston. This trip opened my eyes even more to the heart that God has for His children, whether they're 4 or 40, God absolutely LOVES us! I recognized our calling as a church is much greater than just what can God do for me? But it's more of a response to grace, if Jesus God in the flesh came down to save you and I and He died for all of humanity calling us the church to be His representatives here on earth, what are we to do? I believe Impact Houston has answered that question, not just with words but their lives. It was an absolute honor to be a part of that ministry. I am forever thankful.



# Grant Thomas

God showed me

- That friendships that are formed while co-laboring for God are timeless
- That serving Him is collection of "small things"
  - We are only given one day at a time and it unravels moment by moment.
  - God asks me to be faithful with each one, to build up and not tear down, to listen more than I speak and to be available when I'd rather be selfish
  - What does Christ ask me to do, build a program? No. build a curriculum? No, he asks me to take care of widows and orphans. To visit those in prison and to simply give a cup of water. I realize that I don't do this very often, and I want to change that.
- Serving myself is exhausting, frustrating and depressing
- Serving others is fulfilling and joyful when you understand that what you are doing is not what you are doing. You are serving Christ! And it is far more blessed to give than receive
- I am filthy rich and selfish; I've used my blessings to bless myself instead of others
- I don't seek or relish interruptions as God's knocking on my door or His invitation to share His love and grace
- I want to seek out "undesirables" like Jesus did and Impact currently does. This is exactly what Jesus does for me! He pursues me even though I am weak and full of sin; he keeps looking for me and extending the arm of grace to me. How could I not do that for others?
- Worship is about desperation and I am not nearly desperate enough for God's intervention and presence in my life
- If I have Christ and that is more than enough, perhaps I have too much. Perhaps it is time to come back to what inspired me to faith in the first place...freedom from sin and new purpose in a poured out life of gratitude.

# Seth Whittenberg

This will be my third year going to Houston and every year it opens my eyes to God's physical work in this world. We all too often go to church every Sunday and get in this routine of religion. We read about it in the bible, we learn about it in class and listen to it in sermons. It almost becomes distant to us. We think that it happened in the Bible but not here, today. The reality, and miracle, of life is that God is not a hands-off being. He has a VERY active hand in all things. He is very present in this life, here today, 2015. Houston and the opportunities there bring that to the forefront. God is physically moving and grooving and shaping hearts there. He is alive.

Almost every year, everyone always seeks out a little buddy. This is a little girl or boy who they can sing and dance with and grow with for one week. One little kid that attaches to them during the week. I searched for mine the first few days and none of the kids really attached to me. After hearing one of our young men in the youth talk about letting go and letting God control that, I did. So on Wednesday, during the middle of that day I met this little boy I had never seen. I hadn't seen him the first two days and he was just there. His name was Pablo. He had two little silver front teeth, little hands and fingers and a little smile that lit his whole face up. He became attached to me and I found my little buddy. He was one of the smallest 1<sup>st</sup> graders in our group, yet he had a curiosity and hope in life that just touched me. We went skating for a field trip later that day and Pablo didn't want to skate but he sat on the edge and wanted to hang out with me. We said our goodbyes and I was touched by his presence for just that one day. It turns out, little Pablo never made it back that week. It was sad for me but as I look back at it I realize that, that was God's physical presence in that moment. God speaks to us not always in loud booming voices or big experiences. God can physically come to us in the smallest of human beings, yet can change us if we let him. I only met Pablo for a few hours on that hot June day, but I will never forget him. His smile, his laughter, and his curiosity. I will never forget him. God is physically in our lives and all we have to do is find the little Pablo he is showing us.



# Preston Cleghorn-Gatewood

Hey everyone! If some of you didn't know, I went to inner city Houston this past week, and all I can say from my trip is "WOW!". I went to Impact Church of Christ, expecting to teach little kids about Jesus, our Savior... But instead, they taught me Jesus' love and how easy it is to show it. I love going to Houston because it really opens my eyes to what is in the world, outside of my life. I saw glimpses of God's kingdom that make me hunger and thirst for more. This past week was possible because of so many people. I loved going to Houston and I can't wait to return next year! I can't wait to see what God has in store for me in this next year, but I'm ready to take on whatever he may throw on me because I know that he is with me!



# Kyle Whittenberg

Welcome

*Mat 18:1-4 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

When is the last time you felt welcomed? How did you know you were welcomed? How did you feel? How would it be described? Safety, comfort, worthy, familiar, relaxed, fulfilled, friends, no masks, real you, brave, bold, laughter, singing, dancing, and more laughter: all of these for me describe the experience of being welcomed. The author Anne Lamott says that welcome - both offering and receiving - is our only source of safety. It reminds us that we are wanted, even delighted in, though we are often greedy and selfish.

In only my second year to spend time at Impact Church in Houston, I felt an overwhelming sense of "welcome". Remember these are people and places I have only experienced once, over the course of only 120 hours, one year ago. Sleeping on a cot in a church classroom, packing and unpacking luggage and gear for thirty people every day, sharing the bathroom facilities, and working in hot, muggy weather. How then can this create feelings of "welcome", feelings of "welcome" that you long for? It doesn't seem to make any sense.

This is what happens when you participate in God's kingdom. Those participating with you become a bonded family, a family bond that reminds you that you are wanted, just for who you are, best efforts and mistakes and all. A family that reminds you that you are needed and you have a task to do. A task to extend the same welcome to others: kids, parents, strangers, friends, those without a home, those who need daily care and those who need help just getting through the day. We have a task to share that same feeling of welcome: you are wanted, you matter, and you are worth everything. Christ gave everything for you. Thank you to my fellow participants from Albuquerque, Searcy, and Houston. Thank you for offering and receiving this special kind of welcome and teaching me to do the same.

It's the kind of welcome that says, "Take these kids home please; here are the addresses and the keys to the van. See you in a bit." So you go. You load the van with five young kids you have never met. You buckle them up and try to make sure the cups of lemonade aren't all spilled. You drive through the city streets and sing the song of the books of the Bible, learn names, set boundaries, share smiles and laughs, argue directions and ask for silence. When you arrive, you hesitate unsure if this is the place, wanting to see who had them next but never knowing. When they leave, you call them by name and say be safe and see you again wondering how and when. You pray quickly and silently in your head, get back in the van and then head back. You ready for the next task and continue to participate in the kingdom with your growing family, offering and receiving welcome.



# Kathy Lane

## What is Impact Houston?

**Impact** is ....100 excited children running from their bus into the education building, through our cheer tunnel to join us in singing, games, memory verses, skits, reading groups and VBS. The energy of all the kids plus our groups generates a lot of noise and excitement. During the week we are divided into color groups, reading groups and little/big buddies. We were able to go to the children's museum and roller skating with the kids which gave us more time to bond with all of them.

**Impact** is...stepping out of your comfort zone to fellowship with the residents of Liberty Island and Independence Village, which are residences for the developmentally disabled. We spend time singing, praying, sharing our life stories one on one and eating cookies. Everyone is uplifted by the experience.

**Impact** is...15 hour road trip (each way) with 28 of your closest teens and sponsors. We spent many hours laughing, singing, hugging, leaning on each other's shoulders and sharing close quarters. Our days were full with the Impact kids and our evenings were filled with Liberty Island, Star Pizza, Independence Village and a day at Six Flags in Dallas on our way home. We have an amazing group of teens here at Netherwood Park. Ask one of them about their experience and watch their face light up as they relive some of their favorite moments. You will be blessed as I was during my week at Impact.



## Branden White

This was my first year at Impact so I didn't know anything more than the pictures and stories I've seen and heard, and they were vague at the least, and I didn't know what to expect. The first day with the kids was weird, they were quiet and shy. They really didn't seem that excited about VBS, and I just thought it was normal. But as the week went on they started opening up and seeing those kids finally smiling was awesome. I saw faith and trust in their eyes, and that was an awesome feeling worth coming back for.



# Kathy Whittenberg

## **We Are in This Together**

First of all, I want to express my sincere gratitude to Netherwood Park, our family and friends for all of the support and prayers for our mission trip to Houston. I also would like to thank the Netherwood Youth Group, who I was honored to go on this trip with; the Impact Church of Christ, for showing me how to truly serve and love others; and to the Searcy, Arkansas Youth Group, for helping us run the VBS with such tireless energy and enthusiasm.

Each Sunday after the morning services, the Impact Church serves a meal to the "outdoorsmen", a name given to the homeless population there. This is when I had the honor and privilege of getting to visit with a man named Patrick. Our conversation began with small talk... about how hot and humid it had been, how nice the meal was, etc. But Patrick changed the tone of our conversation when he looked directly at me and said, "You know, we are all in this together." He went on to explain to me that it didn't matter where you lived or how much money you had...that we needed to help each other get to Heaven. His words, to be honest, caught me a little off guard. But I soon realized that my conversation with this tender outdoorsman was one of the most meaningful and heartfelt conversations that I have had about God in quite some time. And I thought I would be the one making a positive difference in someone's life! Patrick filled my heart with so much more.

We continued to see Patrick around the church building throughout the week. He would often be sitting out in the smothering heat and humidity. It was good that we could take him water and food to fill him up physically, but I pray that we gave him spiritual food as well. I pray that we left him full of love and hope.

Patrick made a lasting impression on my heart. I will always remember the words he said, "We are all in this together." No matter where we live or how much money we have, may we continue to work together to build God's kingdom.



# Becca White

Impact Houston has become my favorite trip that the youth ministry does. Not because we get to go to six flags or the mall (although that is a very fun part), but because I am deeply challenged and encouraged every time I go. This year has been the most challenging of them all. Each year we go to a home for adults who have mental and physical disabilities to sing, talk, and eat snacks with them. Liberty Island is a place unlike any I've been to before. The residents are excited to see us and even more excited to worship God with us. This year I realized that the experiences I've had at Liberty Island don't have to stay in Houston, but can be a part of my life in Albuquerque. The Lord has placed a big burden on my heart to start a ministry like this here. I have asked several people to partner with me and I am excited about what is to come. I don't know the place where we will go or much about how this will look, but what I do know is that the Lord will be guiding me in my "Liberty Island Project."



## Gavin Wallace Blake

Impact Houston is a trip to remember. Houston is one of the best trips you can go on. I think one of the best things that ever happened to me was going to Liberty Island. If you have never been Houston on the church group before I will tell you what this place is. It's a home for the disable this place will make an impact on you. We sing, we talk and we serve god wall doing the same thing .this place will probably make you cry after we go. But one thing that will make you cry is saying good bye to you little body. The most important thing is to be happy and play along with the kids. You should never just stand there you should make them wont to hop in and dance and sing. If you ever go you need go on a rout this is a chance to get to know your little body and see where the live. You would have so much fun if you go like this year we played poker. But if you go it is so worth going and doing all the things I have talked about. To summarize JUST GO TO HOUSTON!!!!!!!!!!!!!!



# Andres DeSantiago

Hi, my name is Andres

DeSantiago and I went on the Impact Houston trip. It was my first year going and it was a life-changing experience for me to go. I went because my family went and I went with them. I was in Purple group which is First grade. I had a little buddy named Adam. He was so sweet. I also loved the Downtown Church of Christ from Arkansas. I loved going to Liberty Island and being able to worship with them. I loved the Interns and that they had the heart to be there with the kids for 6 weeks. I loved Houston and so would you.

# Matthew Morse

The first two times that I went to Impact, I returned feeling much closer to God than I had beforehand. Due to that, I went on the trip for the third time this year, with the expectation that it would once more turn out to be a transformative experience. Indeed, over the course of the week, I felt myself being reminded of what it means to serve, and felt closeness to God that I had not felt; well, since the last time I had been to Impact. When we go to Impact, I certainly hope, and believe, that the children we spend so much time with learn more about God's word and His love, but I believe that the experience may be even more meaningful for all of those who work to teach those children.

# Tanner Whittenberg

Impact Houston has been an amazing experience for me in my life. For the last four summers I have made the journey to that amazing place to spend a very short week helping with a VBS for children who truly exemplify the meaning of the phrase "unconditional love". These kids are absolutely incredible. In just four short days, they attach themselves to us, their big buddies, and show all of us God's love in astonishing ways. Most of these children come from very difficult backgrounds. Some come from broken households, being raised by one parent, or sometimes grandparents or aunts and uncles, many come from poverty stricken areas of Houston, and yet, every day, without fail, they come to Impact with huge smiles on their faces, happy to experience all of the cool things they get to do at VBS. It's life changing to see such happiness and love come out of such difficult living conditions. Impact Church of Christ is an incredible place that does unbelievably amazing outreach into their community, and I feel very privileged to be a part of one of their programs, even if it's for just a week.