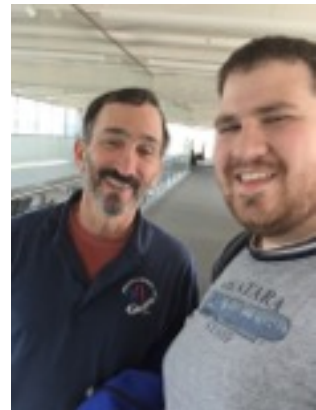


Introduction

After returning home from Israel/Palestine, many people have been asking me about my trip. My favorite question, asked by a friend, gets to the core take aways from my experience, “what is your elevator speech?” Here are a list of take aways that I will unfold throughout this reflection paper that speak to the many encounters, and sights I have experienced during my three week course in Israel/Palestine: 1. Relationships are key; 2. Everybody matters; 3. Reflection is important; 4. I am privileged; 5. It is important to invite and inform conversation on this side of the pond; and 6. The land is important to connect with scripture. Although I have only processed my trip for a short time, I think that these vignettes encompass much of my experience, and prove how rich this experience was for me.

Relationships are key

Although I had not reached my connecting flight yet, I met a man on our first flight to Toronto who I name as my first encounter on this trip with a Jew. As he sat next to me on the first flight, I heard some of his story on how he travels regularly to Israel to visit family, and that his is from Israel. He now teaches at George Washington University in DC, and I will never forget my conversation with him.



After I told him about my trip and my goal to meet people and hear successful stories of peacemaking and peacemakers, he told me something I will never forget. He said, “Make sure you keep in contact with these people, because in order for them to continue their work, they need to know that they are cared for, and that there is hope by doing the work that they are doing.” This quote has resonated with me not just because this Jew was telling me that the

Gabriel Dodd

Palestinian aid workers matter, but because I think that after reflecting on all of my conversations, I believe that the people working for peace need ongoing relationships in order to feel Gods love more than we know.

Since returning, I have contacted some of the many people I met. I tried to practice this goal of mine, and remind those who live in Israel/Palestine, that I have been praying for them, and that I care for a peace that uplifts human life. One response I received said: "I like your spirit and your way of talking, I appreciate your interest of my city, I hope you are well too, it's our pleasure to see you among us again, I will never forget your visit and your support to the justice of our issue, send my salutation to your friends." I am still awaiting responses from some of the other people I reached out to, and hope to keep in contact with some Israeli citizens, aid workers, and Palestinian people. Please help me by holding these people in your hearts.

Everybody Matters

It was a rich experience to be in Israel/Palestine and to talk to Rabbis, Priests, Muftis, refugees, settlers, Muslims, Jews, Christians, Palestinians, Israelis, young soldiers, ex-soldiers, and other students like myself. The longer I was in Israel/Palestine, the more complex my definitions of the people in the land became. For example, I learned that there are Jewish Zionists who work for human rights and are active in working for peace with and for Palestinians. What makes them Zionists is the fact that they desire to live in the land. I met



many Zionists who felt this way on Jerusalem Day. They were demonstrating against marching through the Muslim quarter on the Holiday because it was not a peaceful action to do in front of people who feel robbed of land and citizenship.

Gabriel Dodd

What I learned from all of this was to care for everybody as Jesus cared for the roman soldier, the Pharisees, and the poor and widowed. Without having relationships with as many people as possible, it is harder to obtain peace because we will not understand other points of view. To achieve peace, I believe that we must care for those who we disagree with in order to work towards a solution. I long for a peace that does not need to eliminate a people in order to reach peace. This is a false peace. We are all children of God, and therefore all matter to God regardless if they agree with my understandings or not. Below is a prayer that was given to me at the beginning of the trip by the seminary chaplain. I stuck this prayer in my wallet, and forgot it was there until I was packing to return. The prayer strikes me as a Christian response as I stated before. We are all Children of God, and I need to practice keeping all types of people in my heart, and in my prayers.

Pray not for Arab or Jew,
Palestinian or Israeli
But Pray rather for ourselves
That we might not divide them
in our prayers
But keep them both together
in our hearts.

(based on a prayer by a Palestinian Christian)

Reflection is Important

In a pre-trip blog, I mentioned that I wanted to go and talk to those working for peace in the midst of chaos and to hear what gives them strength to have the faith that they have. What I found was that, sadly, some people were there working for peace for humanitarian purposes and not because of a conviction of peace from Christ at the center. Matthew and I spent the morning of our last day using our time wisely to talk to volunteers who were working in the West Bank with EAPPI. While I asked them a few questions about their faith, half of them said that they

Gabriel Dodd

were not very religious, but they liked that EAPPI (put together from the World Council of Churches) was an ecumenical group that even accepts non religious people to be volunteers.

They were there for humanitarian reasons, and were not necessarily lead there because of a faith conviction. The other half said that they were Christian, but they were not there really because of their work to follow their faith or to bring Kingdom action, they were there to work for peace because of the political unjustness that are happening to

Palestinians. In another question, I asked if the work here has strengthened their faith, or if it has damaged their faith. One girl could hardly answer because she had never thought of it.

She did say, “I have been so busy that I have not had time to

process or reflect on anything at all. The work here is nonstop.” I got the same sense from

Chloe who does similar work in Hebron for CPT because she tries to create quiet space on Friday nights at Tantur. Whether we are in the mission field, or in a completely different part of the world, we should always be in prayer for how God wants us to respond, and how God wants us to grow in the midst of chaos and struggles of Gods Children.

I also learned some surprising things about the Israeli population that lead me to believe that Israelis are also not entirely led by their faith conviction. Almost every Jew we talked with, including people we met on the street and the Jew who shared Shabbat with us, have all moved to Israel in the last decade or so (with a few exceptions), and are mostly originally from America. I learned that many (but not all) Israelis who move into a settlement, do so because of an incentive from the community, or from the state of Israel. Rent can be cheap and attractive for those who live in Tel Aviv with the goal of populating settlements and having an Israeli presence



Gabriel Dodd

in the West Bank. Most Israelis are secular Jews or non-practicing Jews. It is important for me to be led by my faith towards the things I support, and call others to reflect on the work they are doing. I believe that allowing God into the space of your work and your decision making, more peace will be made, and more assured you can be of bringing God's Kingdom to Earth.

Meet Jabra. Jabra is a 28 year old Christian teacher at Hope School - just outside Bethlehem. Jabra is one of the 1% of Christians in Palestine. The rest of Palestinians are Muslim. Jabra had an opportunity to move to Mississippi to get a masters degree, and even visited the States for three months. Jabra ended up going back to Bethlehem because he felt God tugging at his heart. He said " I did not feel that God called me to America.



God called me here to work with Youth. Jesus tells us to love our enemies, even if they hate us or make life bad for us... I don't have to agree with you to have peace, but I have to have a pure heart. You see, Jews see us as suicide bombers & we see Jews as soldiers who want to kill us. That is how we see each other. When we have relationships, we stop looking at them as Jewish, Palestinian, Muslim, Zionist, Israeli, Christian. When we love others unconditionally because Christ loved us, we see a human being, and a child of God. Some people are afraid to try, but if you convince them to try, they will do it. Now I have friends that are Arab and Jew. If we teach the youth, they will learn to love enemies while they are young." Jabra said that many people who are able to leave the country for education hardly come back after they graduate because life is much easier outside Israel/Palestine. However, Jabra listen to God and decided to follow that

Gabriel Dodd

voice. I hope to have as much faith, and to listen to Gods voice if he calls me to do something that is hard to do, and not live the 'easy' life. I want to be led by the Holy Spirit as Jabra is.

I am privileged

I noticed my own role as an American tourist, and how people looked at me as being capable to move almost wherever I wanted to inside Israel and the West Bank. I felt privileged, and I felt guilty because of it. Before going to Israel/Palestine I realized that I am coming from a country that supports the state of Israel, and that I belong to a religion where a majority of members are supportive of Zionism. This resulted in privileges that allowed me to bypass metal detectors most of the time when passing through the Section A checkpoints in the West Bank,



and allowed me to travel in Palestine and Israel when I wanted, and wherever I wanted. I talked to Palestinians who lived in Bethlehem and lived only 4 miles from Jerusalem, but have only been in the Old City twice. They live about 40 miles from the beach, and have never seen the Mediterranean Sea. I was able to move around to these places when I wanted by flashing my American blue passport, and I

felt somewhat guilty. I also expected to be disliked from Palestinians since I am from a nation that supports the checkpoints, the apartheid wall, the Israeli security technology, the assault rifles, the military training, the settlements, the cities, and so much more that have driven civilization and life for arabs so low, however our small group was received with open arms (literally), coffee/tea, and warm conversation.

One day, while walking in Hebron, two people in our group started conversations with two young adults who lived off of a major market. Once they found out that we want to hear

Gabriel Dodd

stories and the perspective of Israelis and Palestinians, they immediately invited us all into their small apartment and treated us to tea and coffee. Their hospitality proved to me that everybody there is deeply interested in conversation to share experiences, and that even though we are Americans, it does not indicate that they view all



Americans as people who support the state of Israel, the occupation of Palestinians, and/or the persecution of Arabs. There is truth to the fact that there are Palestinians who retaliate with violence and suicide bombing, although there are a lot of Palestinians who want to live peacefully with Israelis even though they are persecuted. Likewise, not every American can be characterized, and put into a box. Although I am a privileged American tourist, I was met with love by Palestinians who are angry with America.

It is important to invite and inform conversation on this side of the pond

Another person I met was Sami who was sitting next to me on a short but crowded public bus trip from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. Sami was on his way to work. He was in his mid twenties, and worked two jobs - one was at an auto mechanic shop. I told him about my trip and that I wanted to hear what life is like from different perspectives from different types of people. He told me that he used to be active in an organization called Survive for Peace, and that he enjoyed talking to Americans. Sami told me that I was important in my mission for my trip by saying, “if peace is possible, we need America. Thank you for coming to talk to Israelis and Palestinians.” After hearing this come from somebody I only just met and would not see again, my heart sank for the people there, and encouraged me to educate people about the conflict in Israel/Palestine to Americans, or whoever I can.

Gabriel Dodd

I returned from Israel/Palestine at around 12:30 AM on Sunday, May 24. I went to bed, and was up and ready for church in the morning. I was lucky to not have much jet lag at all on this trip. When I got to church, I had an important conversation with a High School Senior who sincerely wanted to know about the conflict in Israel/Palestine. This youth is well traveled and has an interest in American and global politics. I told him about how the trip opened my eyes for the real need for reconciliation and for the cries of trauma of Palestinians need to be heard in America. He was slightly confused through our conversation why a lot of Christians are Zionists if what I was telling him was true. I told him that he has the ability to do research himself in order to decide on his own political position on the state of Israel, and what an appropriate response is. By explaining to him how I realized a wide spectrum of political views from Jews and Muslims and Christians, and that I read and focused a lot on liberation theology, he got excited about learning more about the people and land there. I am glad for his excitement, and hope to open more eyes to learn about what is happening on the ground in Israel/Palestine. I also hope to keep in touch with the news and politics of Israel/Palestine not that I am back in the States.

The land is important to connect with scripture

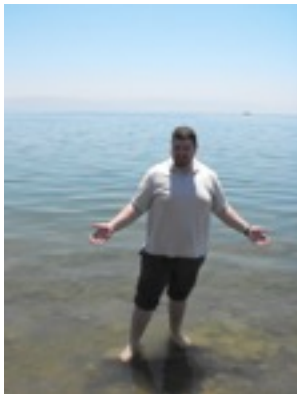
Our small group spent our first five days touring the land: one day in Bethlehem, two days in Jerusalem, one day in Nazareth, and one day around the Sea of Galilee. I also spent one day towards the end of the trip in Masada/Qumran/Ein Geti/Dead Sea, and one day at Caesarea Maritima. Following the touring at the beginning of the trip, I became very focused on the conflict of the area and the stories of peacemakers, and have not had ample time to process what it meant for me to be running around where Jesus walked. Our group spent time with scripture

Gabriel Dodd

when we visited biblical sites, and almost every day during evening reflections (with one or two exceptions). Needless to say, I am still reflecting on the land.

Our group did spend an ample amount of time looking at scripture in the current context of the land, and also reflected on the first century geo political context of the land. I felt it very helpful for us to read scripture when we walked through certain places (the triumphal entry while walking down the Mount of Olives for example). I found a deeper connection for some of the scripture as I walked through the land, and other places were harder to connect with. It was hard for me to stop doubting some of the places that are claimed to be a biblical site. Some places are hard to connect with. My personal context and protestant mind has me question why some come on pilgrimages to see the land, pray through earthly objects. As I watched some kiss stones, graves, and walls, I sensed idolizing. In my heart, I do not think Jesus wants us to put so much value on specific items, but rather longs for us to have direct communication and relation to Him, wherever we are. I understand that I am probably sounding like I am putting down a lot of brothers and sisters in Christ, however I am being honest with some of the struggles I experienced on my trip to the Holy Land.

One of the places I connected with deeply while looking at scripture and the land was the Sea of Galilee. This was an absolute landmark that I could see with my eyes and envision the presence of Jesus, and it was a great experience to have. I could envision Jesus in a boat fishing



with Peter, walking on water, and even calming a storm. It was one thing that could be covered up with a church, a synagog, or a mosque. It was also helpful to see Nazareth because I could envision Jesus as a boy walking around the town of Nazareth on the steep hill that had a

Gabriel Dodd

population of only 500 at the time. I could envision him traveling to the area of today's Nazareth Village and helping with the grape harvest as many neighbors would have helped with in the first century. It was also breathtaking to be in the ruins of the Southern Wall of Jerusalem, which is now an Archeological Park, because it helped me envision Jesus going through the ritual bath and walking up the stone stairs into the City and Temple. The land is a very important part of my trip, because it allows me envision the stories of Jesus better, and it prepares me to be a pastor one day.

Conclusion

This course has helped me understand the land and the context of conflict that people struggle with in the Holy Land. I have heard a call to continue to learn and teach "the things that make for peace." Visiting the land has allowed me to see scripture in new eyes, and Jesus' work on the ground level of an area in conflict. I have also gained valuable relationships with people of different faiths, and different walks of life, and I believe it helps me gain awareness of the complexities of socio-politics. I now hold Israel/Palestine in a new place of my heart, and I will continue to pray for the people I encountered and all the others like them.