

Stephen's European STF Reflection

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Woah. This year has gone by quick. Where to start? Before coming to STF, I had concepts that everyone who came was super holy. Actually arriving to Gafrenz, talking to people I realised that everyone is at a different place with their faith and that's okay. STF has given me a lot. A rare opportunity to focus completely on my faith for 1 year. I feel that I made good use of it. First time outside the U.K with the movement. Being amongst 2nd gen from all over the world, the majority of whom I'd never met before. I've been able to learn more about other cultures and how the movement is in different places of the world. Also what it means to be a BC by being with all these awesome brothers and sisters, that sounds pretty cheesy. But this environment is incredible, so much genuine care, love and support; it helped me grow a lot. I've been lucky enough to build very precious relationships with several of them, expressing and sharing about myself.

I could honestly say I have properly found God in STF and for that I'm so grateful. How? It was a accumulation of all the 3 conditions before Christmas, growing in external result and seeing spirit world work so strongly, having different experience. I really enjoyed kick off, it was a great start to the year, I had lots of fun with Su-Bok. In 1st condition, it was harder due to different problems however I felt very comfortable and united with the team. At that point I was still skeptical about MMBK in general and also God, it improved gradually in the condition. During 2nd condition, eventually I could truly invest for God, for a higher purpose and not myself. The result was undeniable. I trusted God, if I give my best for him he'll give me what I need. Not investing for my own growth and development. It couldn't be a coincidence, not anymore. It was the 3 days before 24 hours challenge. I could feel/see the complete

difference in my attitude, it felt incredible when I was unstoppable just investing for God no matter what limitations got in the way. At that moment I found him, then from that point I built on this, making it more real and substantial. Not just a faith based on miracles. Then came witnessing! I was pretty terrified of witnessing, I knew nothing. The witnessing workshop helped a lot, and got me familiar to Albania.

Initially being Durres my faith got tested, I found it really difficult to relate/pray to God in this witnessing environment which doesn't have clear result, as in with guests it can take a long time, you don't come home with obvious result each day. I also started to become quite ungrateful and negative as a person. I could start to overcome this feeling because I realised it's okay to struggle because I'm entering a new higher level with God. The witnessing environment felt a lot closer to home than fundraising. Specifically being around team members more often and getting on each other's nerves haha.

Manchester Manchester! AHHHHH. I was pretty nervous coming to a Western country, I thought everyone would be super atheist and I'd receive persecution from all the students. Luckily this was not the case. People in Manchester were a lot more open and friendly and also very mixed in terms race, background and religion. I could make my faith more real and well-rounded by explaining our principles/beliefs to people in England. All of us could also develop the skill of ownership, we had no schedule or centre members here so we were essentially on our own. It was tough initially but we got into our stride as we went further along. With the team I could learn how to accept people for who they are and see their positive qualities as from God's perspective. One of my deepest experiences was feeling God's painful heart of sadness. I felt this when a guest I had so much hope didn't come again and would respond. I was grateful for that experience.

In addition to that I could develop a greater understanding of the DP and also True Parents. I didn't know anything before STF, so in this year I've learnt a lot that has strengthened my faith in both God and True Parents. The Korea trip helped so much with this, all the incredible activities we could do the people we could meet and receive testimonies from. Ultimately I felt the trip helped open my heart more to feeling God and TP's heart, especially during studying DP and HDH.

To wrap up my time in Manchester, I felt we could pioneer and definitely lay a foundation here. Even if we couldn't bring typical result with guests, we could give them a sense of belonging and have a positive effect on their lives. Also we could inspire and bring the community together. They are so lovely and supportive. I really appreciated them and all the help they gave us. It was a privilege to be with them and it felt so familiar to home to have a community of families.

I learned more about me too. I came to accept myself more now. Who I am, the strengths I have. I love listening to people and comforting them. What I can offer to a person but also what I need to work on. Like self-value and comparison. The fact that I'm different to others, my faith isn't the same and that's okay. Family! My relationship with my mum improved a lot over this year, appreciating her a lot more through understanding her. Especially through the blessing workshop we had, I could learn more about how hard it must've been having an international marriage. I could also gain more clarity of my father passing away that he's happy in the S.W and he's with me. In kick off MMBK, I had my deepest prayer about him, visualizing him hugging him and holding his hand, it made me cry.

I'm so thankful to all of STF, Debbie, 3rd years and 2nd years. Thanks for looking after me, all the support, guidance and love This year has been truly incredible, not exempt of challenges of course!

After this year, I feel very excited for life afterwards, being able to have a completely different perspective, including God much more strongly and knowing my potential. I know I'll have to work hard to keep this different perspective and high standard, I'm ready as I'll ever be!