

Oregon: Beauty and pain on display

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Most of the world is asleep at 4 a.m.. I am normally asleep at that time, but not one recent morning. I sat on the top of a mountain, shivering from head to toe, and waiting for the sun to rise. If I hadn't been so much in awe, I think I'd have been crying because of the beauty that surrounded me. I looked to the left and saw the Portland city lights shining in the darkness. I looked to the right and I could see mountain peaks against the barely lit sky.



Laura Thomas I was humbled by my surroundings. I felt so small in comparison to these vast sloping mountains. As it grew closer and closer to sunrise time, my surroundings became more and more beautiful. One of my teammates began playing worship music on his phone and we all began praising God for his masterpiece. I was in awe of the fact that the same God who created all this created me as well. I felt God's presence so strongly, I'm almost positive I could have reached out and touched him.

That's when the beauty was interrupted. The first thing we heard was God's name used in vain, followed by a whole stream of cuss words. A

group of teenagers decided to join us for the sunrise. They ignored our presence and began climbing over the railing and all over the rocks. I was afraid one of them would fall or get hurt. It was evident that they were high, and they decided to bring some weed with them. Every other word out of their mouths was obscene. All I could think about was: Who are these kids behind these masks? What struggles are they facing, what pain have they felt? What has caused them to hide behind these drugs and cursing?

Darkness intrudes

I am completely stunned at how well this represents my time here in Oregon. From the first moment I stepped onto Oregon soil, I was surrounded by God's beauty. I've never been anywhere as beautiful as this, and I would love to just sit here forever and admire the beauty. However, with each corner I turn, I am reminded how much pain and spiritual lostness there is here. For every beautiful thing I experience, I experience something painful, as well. And even when I am completely surrounded by God's marvelous light, so much darkness still crosses my path.

During my time here, I've completely fallen in love with both this place and the people. I've seen so much beauty and felt God's presence deeply and passionately. But I've also seen so much darkness that I cannot help but feel overwhelmed.

Turning darkness into light

In Oregon, God has shown me you can see him everywhere. There is nowhere you can go on this planet where you cannot see at least one of his masterpieces. But God has also shown me that so many of his masterpieces have been tarnished with darkness. So much pain fills this place, that it is very difficult to see the beauty behind it. But God desires to turn this darkness into light. He desires to turn all the pain into beauty. And I really feel God calling me to be a part of that. I think God wants to use me as a

vessel in this beautiful place, and if that's not exciting, I do not know what is.

Laura Thomas, a student at Tarleton State University, served with [Go Now Missions](#) in Beaverton, Ore.