I was in church at 6am. I am not sure why, but I was there. Ghanaians in colorful fabric surrounded me, and a number of people were fanning themselves with church bulletins. Even at this early hour, it was hot. I had been in Ghana for eight weeks—long enough to be able to stumble through the Twi lyrics during worship, and long enough to expect an empty faucet when I woke up that morning.

I am not sure what the pastor was preaching that morning, but at one point he mentioned a verse from Philippians 4. Maybe I was bored, but I decided to find the verse for myself. I never found the verse he mentioned, but I found the verse I was looking for:

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”
Philippians 4:12-13

It was a verse I had heard often, but that morning, something clicked, and I knew that I finally had words to describe what God had been teaching me in Ghana.

Situations in Ghana were not always ideal: the water did not work half of the time, and the electricity switched off occasionally. It was hot, and our dorm rooms did not have air conditioning—let alone fans. Sometimes we ate chicken and rice for five days straight, and we just craved some “normal” food like cereal. Most of us did not get Ghanaian roommates like we were hoping. But Philippians 4:12-13 reminded me to “be content in any and every situation.”

So I changed my perspective.

The water did not work half of the time, but it worked the other half. For the times it did not work, we had buckets. Cereal was a little expensive and hard to come by, but we had wakye and red red and egg sandwiches for one cedi. Most of us never lived with Ghanaian roommates, but sometimes we felt like we had seventeen siblings within our group.

But being “content in any and every situation” goes beyond things like running water, warm showers, and cereal. It speaks to the opportunities we have been given in life, the friends we have made, and the family surrounding us.

So now, back in the United States, when I think about being content, I think about Ghana. I think of the Ghanaians at the Night Market who smile and ask how you’re doing. I think of the school children in Adenkrebi who play football and ompe in clothing that is too big for them. I think of Ghanaian women in a Northern village dancing under the hot African sun. I think of the experiences I had in Ghana, the people I met, and the lessons I learned. And I remind myself to focus on what I have, rather than focusing on what I do not.