

V+H

MAGAZINE

TAKING THE LEAD

THE FUTURE OF MISSIONS
IN LATIN AMERICA

"...YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES IN JERUSALEM AND IN ALL JUDEA AND SAMARIA, AND TO THE END OF THE EARTH" - ACTS 1:8 (ESV)



VOICE | CONTROLZ.FM: SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE OF THE NEXT GENERATION
HANDS | THE FIRST PRIORITY: REAL LIFE LESSONS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Our Legacy in Latin America

Dear friend of Reach Beyond,

A few months ago, Becky and I caught a flight into the Amazon jungle and then slogged our way on a muddy path to a small village hidden in the endless green. Our Reach Beyond team had recently installed a clean water system in the community. Just as we arrived, a wild pig inadvertently wandered into the village. Someone yelled. Immediately, men with guns and spears materialized out of nowhere and rushed headlong into the bush. While the men hunted for the pig, our team visited with the chief and a handful of his tribal elders. They gave us a tour of the spring, the water pump and the elevated tank. It was impressive. The elders went on to explain that having access to clean water has transformed the health and well-being of the community. In a private meeting, the chief confessed that he had recently become a believer in Jesus because of the witness of the missionaries that had installed the pumping system. He was looking forward to the day when a church would be planted in his village.

An hour later, as we enjoyed a plate of freshly butchered pork, a man and his wife clambered up the slippery path to the community center where we were eating. When we asked them to introduce themselves, they said that they were “evangelists” and were on a three-day trek to share the Good News with a distant tribe. As they talked, I was once again amazed at how the gospel had made significant in-roads into the least likely of places.

When Clarence Jones arrived in Ecuador 87 years ago, there were hardly any evangelical believers. Today, there are millions. They live all over the country. From the Amazon basin to the Pacific Coast. In the remote villages to the thriving and chaotic cities.

In the city of Quito, HCJB Radio recently sponsored a missions conference where I was invited to speak. Hundreds of people showed

JOHN 15:16

“...but I chose you...”

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you."



Voice + Hands Magazine is produced bi-monthly by Reach Beyond.

up. A dozen Latin American countries were represented in the crowd. At the end of the conference, an invitation was given. Dozens of young men and women came forward to dedicate their lives to missionary service.

It's amazing to see how the gospel has taken root in Ecuador through the faithful witness of missionaries and indigenous leaders! Admittedly, there is still much disciple-making that needs to be done. But in Latin America, there is now a strong Church with enormous potential for unleashing the kingdom of Jesus.

Over the last few years, the role of Reach Beyond in Ecuador has been undergoing a significant shift. Where once we were pioneers in evangelism, medical care and community development, we are now focused on equipping and empowering the Ecuadorian Church to take the voice and hands of Jesus to the nations. Through ministries like Corrientes and Apoyo, we are helping to unleash an army of kingdom workers.

I was once again amazed at how the gospel had made significant in-roads into the least likely of places.

As I write these words, I am very mindful that many of you have played a key role in the growth and maturation of the Latin Church by giving of your time, treasure and talent. Some of you have served as vocational missionaries or as working visitors. Others have made sacrifices so that you can financially support the work of others. Many have prayed. The long and faithful commitment of our gospel investors has resulted in amazing fruit for the kingdom!

In this issue of V+H, you'll learn more about the work in Ecuador. For us in Reach Beyond...it's the place where it all began.

Blessings on you,

Steve Harling
President



OUR VISION

To see Jesus known and loved among all people. - REVELATION 7:9

OUR MISSION

To facilitate a partner-driven movement that results in every unreached people group of more than 100,000 individuals having ready access to a relevant and transformational gospel witness. - MATTHEW 28: 19



REACH BEYOND

1065 Garden of the Gods Rd
Colorado Springs, CO 80907

TOLL FREE 1-800-873-4859
T: 719-590-9800 **F:** 719-590-9801

GENERAL INQUIRIES:
info@reachbeyond.org

/voiceandhands

/voiceandhands

/voiceandhands

/company/voiceandhands

ControlZ.fm:

SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE OF THE NEXT GENERATION

About six years ago, HCJB in Ecuador launched an online streaming channel called “ControlZ.fm.” ControlZ streams music and Christian content for Spanish-speaking teens and twenty-somethings around the world. Two million teens from 45 countries listened to ControlZ this year. The venture not only impacts the next generation of the Latin American Church, but also how Reach Beyond will do digital outreach in the future.

Matt Parker, a missionary with Reach Beyond, is on staff at HCJB and started ControlZ.fm along with Larry Castro. “My first real use in ministry for new media was ControlZ which was really fun, because no one had done it. No one knew how to do it, so I got to experiment and see,” he says.

Originally, the Center for Christian Communicators (CCC) in Ecuador intended to operate the radio stream for HCJB. But before ControlZ launched, the CCC closed. So, HCJB hired two young Ecuadorians, Fernanda Quezada and Bryan Rubio, to coordinate the volunteers and content instead.

Fernanda, Bryan and Matt choose the programming for ControlZ. Fernanda works with volunteers to create videos, while Bryan and Matt oversee the radio spots and write devotionals for the website. The other key member of ControlZ, Jimmy Sarango, appears in many of the videos and hosts a show on ControlZ. While the Parkers are on their home ministry assignment, Fernanda is running ControlZ.

“She does a really good job of connecting with teens and finding volunteers to come help with video,” Matt says.

Everyone on the ControlZ team besides Fernanda are volunteers. A guy from Panama writes contributing articles. Another guy from Argentina creates videos and other web content. The entire ControlZ team is less than 10 people.

In the beginning Matt kept HCJB’s name away from ControlZ, because he felt that HCJB’s religious reputation would not appeal to teenage non-believers.

ControlZ does something that most Christian radio stations in Latin America will not do—they play secular pop songs along with Christian songs to reflect a typical teenager’s playlist. While many churches support ControlZ, some criticize the decision to incorporate non-Christian music. But Matt is satisfied with the teens’ positive responses to ControlZ.

“Sometimes you have to use something they like to get them to listen to something different” he says. “Our strategy with ControlZ has been exactly that—using relatable content that is of interest to them with a twist.”

“Our strategy with ControlZ has been ... using relatable content that is of interest to them with a twist.”

ControlZ features short spots called “microprograms” between songs. These microprograms cover topics such as dating, love, addictions and other relatable struggles. The tone is conversational, presenting Christian voices with diverse opinions. In a recent series, Matt and another contributor gave opposite perspectives on teen dating.

Other ControlZ features include keeping New Year’s resolutions, resolving conflict with parents and a message about whether or not Christians are intolerant. Their piece about singleness, called “#foreveralone,” was more directly evangelistic, affirming that Jesus wants to satisfy the loneliness in our hearts. That video reached 1.2 million.

“We’ve noticed that lately we’ve been more direct with Christianity,” Matt says. “We’ll say, ‘You know what? Jesus loves you.’ And we’re getting more responses that way.”

One girl commented on Facebook, “I was literally about to commit suicide, but your post about suicide really touched me and kept me from making a bad decision, and I want to thank you.”

Others post comments such as, “Oh, man, I never thought about it like that” or “I thought I was the only one who had this issue.” Matt is encouraged to read these comments because written responses show an exceptional level of engagement, especially from a teenager.

Some people ask questions about doctrine, but most of the listeners don’t have much background in theology. Matt says that his theological training from Moody doesn’t help him much when he writes content, because he has to keep the language as light as possible so that it’s relatable.

Matt avoids putting verses in the devotions he writes. He will discuss an issue through a biblical lens, and may use a biblical term or phrase, but the point is to create a discussion that non-Christians could follow. “Sometimes I will say, ‘And that comes from the Bible,’ which can surprise them because they have one idea of what Christians are and to see a different perspective helps them to open their minds a little more.”

GIVE, GO, & PRAY.



GIVE: Help proclaim the gospel to unreached people by giving to the work of Reach Beyond. Your one-time or recurring gift can help fund new technologies and innovative programming like ControlZ. Digital communications allow us to reach groups with the gospel in countries where we otherwise would not have access. **Make your donation at reachbeyond.org/give.**

GO: Do you have a passion for seeing Jesus known and loved among all people? Do you have skills in digital media? **Visit reachbeyond.org/go** to learn more about short-term or career options using VOICE strategies to reach the unreached.

PRAY: Pray for the young people reached through ControlZ.fm, that they would continue to seek Christ and invite Him in to change their lives. Pray for continued support for this ministry. Pray that Reach Beyond can launch similar digital programs in unreached areas of the world, that God would bring workers and partners in digital media to serve UPGs around the globe.

Last year, Fernanda, Bryan, Jimmy and Matt sat down to plan a ControlZ conference, but they didn't know how it would work out. They realized that 80 percent of teens in Ecuador—and Latin America as a whole—have already had sex. The Church preaches abstinence but not as much about grace when someone makes a mistake.

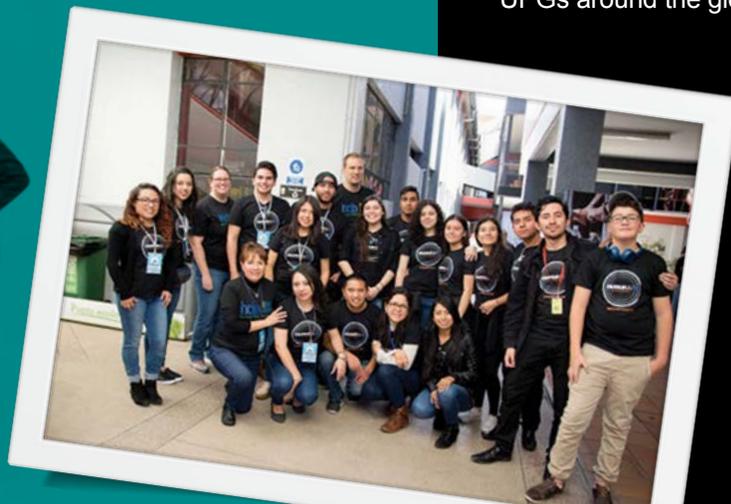
The team wanted to answer questions like: “What happens after this?”; “How should I be feeling about this?”; “What should I do?” They knew that any conference about sexual purity had to be light-hearted and unthreatening, since their message was basically about boundaries.

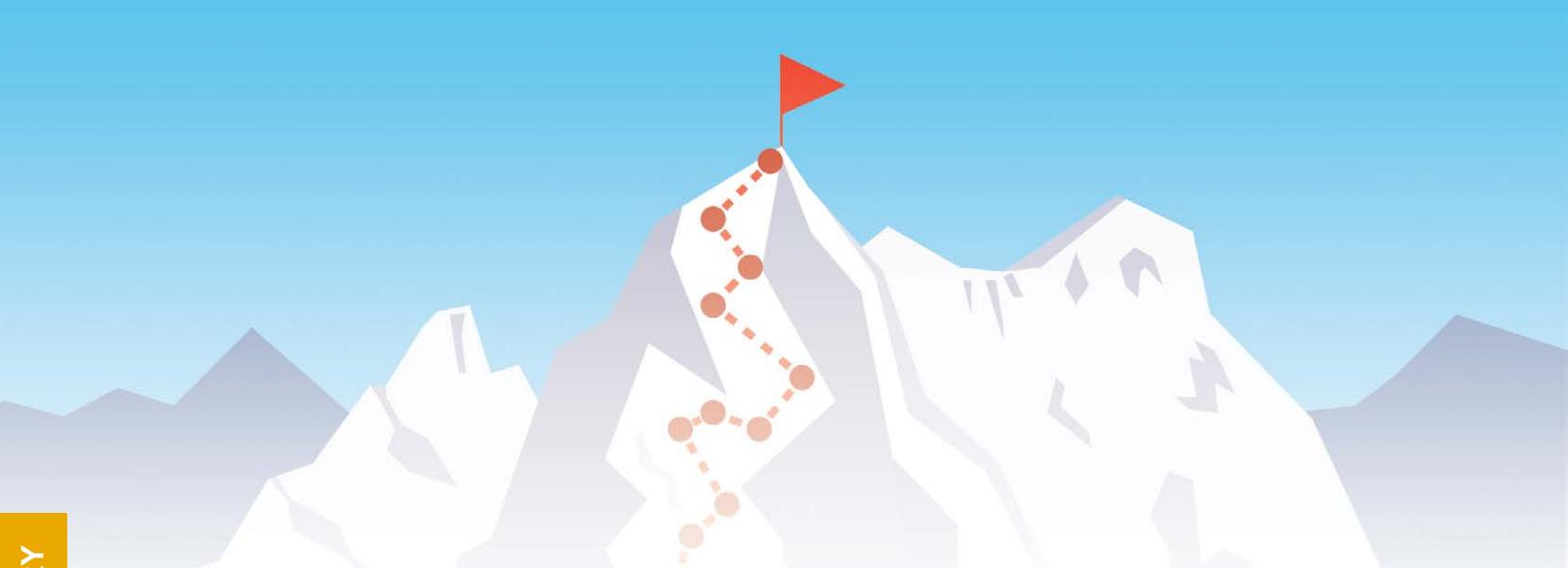
“When you say ‘boundaries,’ teens will back off, but if you say it in a light manner, they will actually listen,” Matt says. “We wanted to let them know, ‘Okay, it happened, but you can be forgiven, and you can be restored. Just because it happened that doesn’t make you any less valuable.’”

The team along with HCJB held their conference “We Made Out. Now What?” last year and “We Made Out. Now What? Part 2” in April. For the second conference, they brought in three Christian comedians as speakers. One comedian talked about sexual purity and abstinence. Another told his story and about how he resisted temptation as a teenager. And the last one addressed the issue: “So, what happens now?”

After the conference, many of the teens said they thoroughly enjoyed the conference and asked when the next one would be. The ControlZ team plans to hold these conferences annually, maybe even twice a year if their team grows.

The success of ControlZ opens discussion for how to replicate its success in other parts of the world. While teens from 45 different countries are tuning in to the digital broadcast from Ecuador, how can this format be used successfully to reach other languages and people groups? Reach Beyond will continue to explore those questions and invest in digital ideas as we seek to bring the gospel to the least reached. ■





TAKING THE LEAD

THE FUTURE OF MISSIONS IN LATIN AMERICA

This past summer, HCJB Radio in Ecuador held a parenting conference, attracting 1,200 believers and non-believers anxious to hear a Christian perspective on a subject critical to families. Local law limited the audience to 1,200 in the building, but crowds stood outside asking for the content. This wasn't a conference dreamed up by American missionaries serving in Ecuador. It was led by nationals, organized by the now Ecuadorian-owned and operated HCJB Radio, working with the local Ecuadorian Church.

THE CHRISTIAN LANDSCAPE OF MISSIONS IN LATIN AMERICA HAS CHANGED.

In 1931, Clarence Jones launched the first Christian radio station in an unreached country that had fewer than 10 radios. But according to the Joshua Project, today 95 percent of the people groups in Latin America have been reached, with 15.8 percent of the population identifying as evangelical.

While there is still work to do in Latin America, the Church is poised for a new role. And that also means a new role for missions organizations, including Reach Beyond.

“Reach Beyond has to step aside so that the Latin American Church can lead the mobilization effort,” says Dan Shedd, who has served as the regional director over the Latin America Region for the past seven years. “We aren't going to own and operate anymore, but rather partner. Our goal now is to come alongside the local Church and help to train, support and mobilize.”

At the height of Reach Beyond's ministry in Ecuador, it owned and operated HCJB Radio, Hospital Vozandes-Quito and Hospital Vozandes del Oriente in Shell, a high-power shortwave transmitter site broadcasting the gospel in dozens of languages around the globe, a hydro-electric plant, clinics across Ecuador, community development and training projects, a compound that supported more than 400 missionaries living and working in the area, and more. However, owning and operating so much in Ecuador took its toll on the ministry.

“When you own stuff, you spend all of your time managing stuff. The only way we were going to survive in Latin America was to divest ourselves, to empower the Church in Latin America. Because that is the organization that God actually created, not HCJB,” Dan says. “He created the Church to further His kingdom. We needed to empower nationals to take on the radio station and hospital, to rely on the local church, local donations and national staffing.”



FROM OWNING TO EMPOWERING

Piece by piece, Reach Beyond is transferring ownership of its local ministries in Quito, Ecuador to empower the national Church to lead. We have gone from over 400 missionaries in Quito, to around 30. The reduction in resources isn't because we no longer see value in the work; it is because the nationals can now take on the work themselves.

HCJB Radio, first launched by Clarence Jones all those years ago, has now become its own entity, run by an Ecuadorian board and managed by Anabella Cabezas. Anabella began as a secretary at HCJB, working on English programming. As time went on, she recognized the potential of media to reach into a person's life in a non-threatening way. Now, as the director, she embraces creative strategies to communicate the gospel.

One way HCJB reaches out to the community is by putting on live shows in churches and marketplaces outside of Quito where listeners can meet the producers and put faces to the voices. In Quito, HCJB hosts three Family Life conferences per year that welcome 1200 churched and unchurched people.

"These conferences have ignited unity among the local churches in Ecuador," says Dan. "Because they are locally-driven and produced, it reinforces the feeling of, 'yes, we can do missions here and around the world.'"

Not only are people tuning in to the radio and turning out to the conferences, but by investing in digital technologies, HCJB is now finding an even broader reach. Reach Beyond missionary and HCJB staff member, Matt Parker, has been able to experiment in social media and

online streaming to reach a younger audience. The online community is now greater than the traditional radio audience, giving the station a new platform to share the gospel in creative ways.

Over the past five years we have managed to change our audience. Before the audience was 45-60, now it's 25 and up as a result of the way we've done our programming and used social media," Matt says. "We've been able to reach the younger generation, which is great because they are the future of the Church."

“Being a teaching hospital, it has trained many medical professionals that are now serving throughout the country in influential positions.

In addition to handing over the “Voice” strategies to nationals, Reach Beyond is also in the process of handing over the “Hands” ministries to locals. A major piece of this is Hospital Vozandes-Quito, founded in 1955. Pretty soon after coming to Ecuador, Clarence Jones realized you couldn't share the gospel without also taking care of more



“...you have heard me say...

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”

immediate physical needs. Medical clinics and caravans led to building a hospital, which became the standard for how to do medical care in Ecuador.

However, hospitals carry major liabilities and financial burdens. By turning the hospital over to a national for-profit entity, it will actually have more opportunity for partners and medical advancements. While Reach Beyond is in the process of turning over the hospital to Ecuadorian control, the ministry continues to use resources there to train people and support medical caravans.

“The hospital has been an important part of our legacy in Latin America,” says Dan. “Being a teaching hospital, it has trained many medical professionals that are now serving throughout the country in influential positions. Many of them have come to faith in Jesus while doing their residency. The hospital will continue to live out their motto, ‘To the Glory of God and the Service to Ecuador.’”

REACHING BEYOND

Now that HCJB Radio and Hospital Vozandes-Quito are under Latin management, Reach Beyond can shift from leading Voice and Hands strategies to mobilizing the Latin American Church. Missions organizations have targeted Latin America for over 100 years and now second and third-generation Christians want to be mobilized for global missions. “All along we have been grounded in Latin America and reaching the unreached,” Dan says. “It started with shortwave radio. The future could be sending people.



We are at a new phase with missions. We want to explore ways we can send Latin missionaries who are called to go to unreached people groups.”

The Muslim world is more accepting of workers from Latin America than those from Western nations. Latin America has no historical conflict with Africa, the Middle East or Asia. Latin Americans also share physical and cultural traits with the Arab world. For a while, Europe and North America led the missions movement, but now churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America are poised to take the lead.

“There are so many people on fire and willing to do missions in Latin America,” says Matt Parker. “The hard part is getting the funding.” That is why the partnership model is so needed.

“We see that fruit, and now we are excited about how Latin America will be able to serve on the global stage.”

TRAINING THE NEXT LEADERS

Reach Beyond’s credibility from years of working in Ecuador has positioned the organization well for now equipping and training leaders out of Latin America.

Reach Beyond started Apoyo (Spanish word for “support”) in 1992 to train ministry leaders in Ecuador, Peru, Cuba and Argentina to disciple younger believers. To complete the two-year training, about 30 or 40 pastors meet monthly for an all-day retreat where they study leadership themes and build relationships with one another. The program has come alongside the Church in areas of leadership development that has empowered many, especially lay workers, with good teaching resources.

The model has a multiplying effect of training trainers.

Another training program out of Ecuador, Corrientes, provides practical missions training, covering subjects such as ministry strategy, cultural adjustment and member care. Corrientes started in 2009 to respond to the difficulties that Latin missionaries were facing serving so far away from their community. Training workshops addressed issues such as “Evangelism through Digital Media,” and “What is Preparation of a Cross-Cultural Missionary?” Corrientes has



HOW CAN YOU HELP?

GIVE, GO, & PRAY.

mentored 54 Latin missionaries to serve around the world.

So far, Corrientes has only mentored missionaries sponsored by other mission agencies, but Dan looks forward to the day Ecuador will send Latin American Reach Beyond missionaries to work among unreached people groups.

“The Corrientes project is still an important piece,” says Curt Cole, VP of Global Ministries. “We want to be a part of mobilizing the Church for global missions. They are already doing it, but our legacy gives us the respect and trust to help.”

A LEGACY IN LATIN AMERICA

“The legacy that we have in the Latin America Region is allowing us to have the global ministry we have now,” says Curt. “The legacy gives us trust. We’ve been there so many years. We did Voice and Hands. We launched our community development there. We launched digital media there. Thirty years ago, we began regionalizing, taking the story beyond Ecuador and doing it closer to the unreached people groups. And now we are at the next phase.”

Because nationals are able to take over the Voice and Hands initiatives in Ecuador, Reach Beyond is able to divert more resources to the unreached areas of the world, specifically in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. However, even resources in Latin America are being used to help these regions.

Believers from 35 different countries worship at English Fellowship Church in Quito. An Iranian couple in the congregation use an old Reach Beyond station to broadcast the gospel in Persian to unreached people groups in North Africa and the Middle East.

“We played a role in evangelization of the Latin church. Pastors have told us that without HCJB, the growth of the Church in Ecuador would have been much slower,” says Curt. “We see that fruit, and now we are excited about how Latin America will be able to serve on the global stage.” ■

GIVE: Join us as we continue to open new doors and reach new people groups. Become a +partner and make a recurring gift to the work of Reach Beyond. **Learn more by visiting reachbeyond.org/+partner**

GO: Do you want to be a part of seeing Jesus known and loved among all peoples? Learn more about ways you can partner with Reach Beyond in career or short-term missions by visiting **reachbeyond.org/go**

PRAY: Pray for a movement among the Church. There are over a half a billion evangelical Christians in this world, and the vast majority have yet to take an active role in God’s plan to engage the least reached. As we grieve the plight of the unreached, we also grieve the un-sent. Pray for doors to be opened for partnership, and pray for wisdom for our Church Engagement team to be able to serve well.

THE FIRST PRIORITY

REAL LIFE LESSONS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Jessi Brooks was surprised how many villages would turn down a free clean water system by simply refusing to maintain it. She and her husband, Josh, just completed a two-year community development training program with Reach Beyond where they visited unreached villages in Central Asia to offer clean water help. Known as the CHILI program (Community Health Intercultural Learning Initiative), the program sought to take young professionals with an interest in missions, and give them in-depth training and mentoring to prepare them for career missions.

“All of a sudden I felt this undeniable tug on my heart directing me to something different, something bigger,”

Jessi and Josh were newlywed engineers working in Houston before joining CHILI.

“All of a sudden I felt this undeniable tug on my heart directing me to something different, something bigger,” she says.

Intimidated by the calling, Jessi didn't mention it to Josh for about a month. When representatives from a clean water organization gave a presentation at the Brooks' church, Jessi asked Josh what he thought about it. It turned out that he had the same desire. They agreed to pursue it immediately, before they had kids. Google led them to Reach Beyond's CHILI program. After a period of prayer and consultation, they applied.



“We left our engineering jobs in Houston, sold most of our things and flew to Ecuador to begin the next two years of our life!” Jessi says.

The Brooks joined a team of five and trained for six months in Shell, Ecuador. The team would spend two weeks in the classroom and the third in the jungle, installing water systems. At the end of the training Josh and Jessi flew back to the States for a week and then moved to Central Asia.

Four members of the CHILI team, three engineers and a physiotherapist, served in Central Asia; the other one stayed in Ecuador to write materials for the next CHILI program. The engineers worked on water projects suggested by a partner ministry in the area, but they also sought out projects on their own. Many of these fell through because the villages did not follow up.

While they waited, the Brooks began to adjust to their new city. To get around, most people walk or take a minivan ride-share, for about 15 cents.

The Brooks originally assumed they would be learning Russian, but soon understood why they were told to learn the local language instead. People Jessi met on the street initiated civil conversations in Russian but immediately brightened when she responded in their heart language. “We had so many great encounters,” she says.

During one village project, the Brooks stayed with a Muslim lady for two weeks and again whenever they came back for a visit. They had some spiritual conversations, and she knew what the Brooks believed.

NEXT YEAR, the CHILI program will move from Ecuador to Spain in order to become a more mobile training initiative, equipping workers to reach UPGs in a near-neighbor context. The geographic move also comes with a name change. CHILI will now be known as FAST TRACK, to better reflect the developmental goal of the program to mentor and equip program participants over two years, preparing them for long-term success in career missions.

To learn more, visit REACHBEYOND.ORG/FASTTRACK.



But nothing seemed to change in her heart. Jessi's language teacher, a former Muslim, told her to be patient because conversion takes a long time.

During their residency, the lady's brother-in-law died. Jessi and Josh spent hours with her and her family during the 40 days of mourning. She later told their translator that they were "people of light."

Eventually, after a series of setbacks and waiting, a village among a major unreached people group in the area showed interest in the CHILI team's offer. They had previously installed a system to catch water from the springs, but it was not protected from bugs and debris. The village wrote, "You don't even have to come. Just send us the plans."

When the CHILI team arrived, the local point person had coordinated all the logistics. The team had none of the usual hassle of requesting a cement truck or enlisting workers. The locals knew exactly how to procure the materials and manpower. All the team had to supply was the geotextile for filtering the water. The project took only two days, and the team had time to relax and get to know their hosts.

The team shared their faith with the community, and, as Muslims, the people respected the CHILI team's

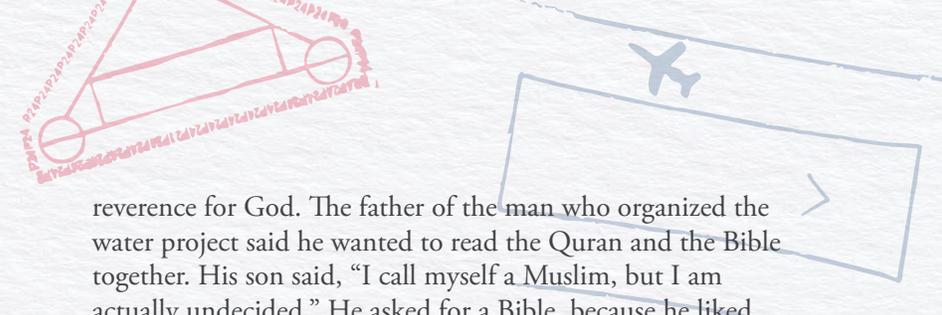
"Be excited about whatever God has for you."

GIVE, GO, & PRAY.

GIVE: Reach Beyond is dedicated to walking alongside global Christian partners as they initiate medical outreaches, clean-water projects and programs to train village healthcare educators and counselors – ministries that speak to spiritual, emotional and physical needs in their communities. If you would like to support community development outreaches, please prayerfully consider giving to our Global Hands initiatives. Visit reachbeyond.org/globalhands to give your one-time or recurring gift today.

GO: Do you sense that the Lord is leading you or someone you know to serve among unreached people groups? Do you already have some basic skills but aren't quite ready for career missions? We would like to invite you to join our 2020 FAST TRACK Program (formerly known as CHILI). Come as a willing learner – we'll give you the skills, the coaching and the practice you need to thrive in career missions. The 2020 program will begin with three months of training in Spain before deploying in small groups to unreached areas. After completing the program, you'll be prepared to go to the field long-term. **To learn more, visit reachbeyond.org/fasttrack**

PRAY: Pray for our current class of CHILI students, that they will hear God's direction for their lives as they complete their training. Pray for our CHILI/FAST TRACK director, Wim de Groen, and his family as they relocate to Spain in 2019 and prepare for the 2020 program. Pray for the communities served through this program, that the seeds planted would bear fruit, and both physical and spiritual needs would be met.



reverence for God. The father of the man who organized the water project said he wanted to read the Quran and the Bible together. His son said, "I call myself a Muslim, but I am actually undecided." He asked for a Bible, because he liked what the team had told him about Jesus. So, when the CHILI team returned to the village later, they brought a Quran and a Bible.

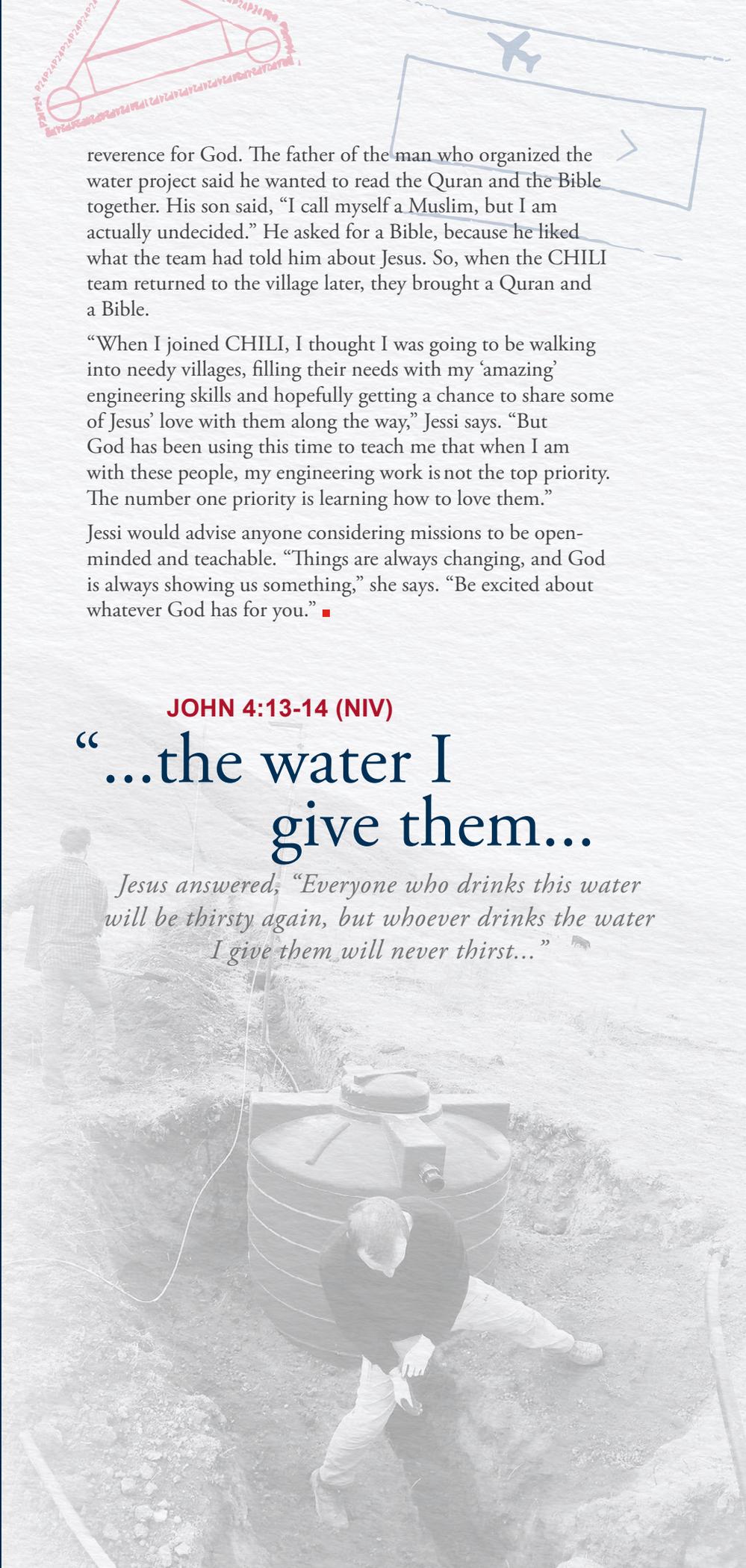
"When I joined CHILI, I thought I was going to be walking into needy villages, filling their needs with my 'amazing' engineering skills and hopefully getting a chance to share some of Jesus' love with them along the way," Jessi says. "But God has been using this time to teach me that when I am with these people, my engineering work is not the top priority. The number one priority is learning how to love them."

Jessi would advise anyone considering missions to be open-minded and teachable. "Things are always changing, and God is always showing us something," she says. "Be excited about whatever God has for you." ■

JOHN 4:13-14 (NIV)

"...the water I give them..."

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst..."



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FOLLOW ME

BEING A DISCIPLE OF JESUS

By Ty Stakes, Director of Global Partnerships

Sunshine glinted off the Sea of Galilee as its waves lapped at the feet of Peter and Andrew, two hard-working, uneducated fishermen. It was just another day, and they were hoping for nothing more than a decent catch. But they were about to get more than they had ever imagined! The disruption that would change everything was arriving on the scene: Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy Man everyone was talking about, was walking up the beach. He approached these two unremarkable fellows and offered a simple invitation, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19, NASB). And everything started to change.

Two thousand years later, Jesus invited another unqualified nobody to be His follower—me. It was the start of my journey of becoming a disciple of Jesus.

What does it mean to be a disciple? Jesus’ invitation to follow Him makes it clear that a disciple is a follower. However, that’s somewhat ambiguous: is a disciple a student or an apprentice? They’re not the same: a student learns to recite what his Teacher knows, and an apprentice learns to do what his Master does. On my journey, I started as a student, and now I am an apprentice. Here’s what happened:

Coming into the Christian faith, I knew nothing and had a lot to learn. I went to a Bible Church, and they took the Bible very seriously. I learned a lot about Jesus, the Bible, the Church, local ministry, missions, and so on. I applied a lot of what I learned, too, and in those early days, my behavior changed radically. Jesus gave me new priorities, new friends, a different lifestyle, upgraded moral standards—indeed, old things had passed away and everything was made new.

After a while, I was ensconced in the Christian community. We had Bible studies to increase our biblical knowledge. We did devotions and listened to sermons to learn new stuff too. Not to mention Christian books, Christian radio, Christian TV and Christian movies. All of it to amplify our understanding and assure our holiness, while unfortunately isolating us from the culture around us. I didn’t know it at the time, but this was a problem. We were learning a lot, which was good, but where was the fruit? Not many people were coming to the church to meet Jesus. I started to ask myself if we were missing something.

They were disciples who made disciples, and those disciples then made more disciples, and so forth.

I often wondered about Jesus’ followers from 2,000 years ago—how did they accumulate all the knowledge a disciple needs to know? They didn’t have books, and couldn’t read even if they had them. No technology either. The church had only a few “great preachers” and was mostly made up of regular folks meeting in houses. What did it look like for them to be disciples, to follow Jesus? And how did the Church grow?

A while later I got involved in a project in a developing country where simple, uneducated, indigenous people were making a huge impact in their communities. They were disciples who made disciples, and those disciples then made more disciples, and so forth. Thousands of people were becoming disciples of Jesus, hundreds of churches were being started—it was out of control! It looked just like the Early Church. It inspired me to rethink my approach to being a disciple by reexamining the way Jesus and His earliest followers did it.

My indigenous friends and the early disciples knew that Jesus is the reason for everything. His arrival on earth as a man is the story of the Old Testament and His mission until His return is the point of the New Testament. Most importantly, His invasion of my own life was what changed everything for me! So, I decided to dig into Jesus more than I ever had before.

So, I started reading the Gospels in all of my Bible-reading times with a desire to focus my attention solely on my Savior, Jesus. I didn’t want to know more about Him; I wanted to know Him and how to be like Him! Bottom line, I wanted a spiritual reboot in which I could do life in the Jesus way, which, when it’s all said and done, is really being His apprentice.

MATTHEW 4:19 (NASB)

“...I will make you
fishers of men”

“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me”

It has been a wonderful time of growth and joy for me. Here are the four most life-changing truths I have been confronted with on this journey from student to apprentice:

- Jesus’ message and agenda were to establish the kingdom of God. And of course, the reality that He is God’s chosen King is the key element of the kingdom.
- Jesus’ disciples were not just students; they were apprentices. They spent all their time with Jesus, listened to everything He said and learned to do life His way.
- Jesus’ greatest desire for His apprentices is that they would obey His commands. After all, the King is to be obeyed, right? He said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15, NASB). And in the Great Commission, His mandate for future disciples is that they would “obey all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20, BSB). Though we know every biblical principle is important and helpful, the true measure of our life as a disciple is obedience. Knowing little and obeying much is better than knowing much and obeying little.
- Jesus takes being a disciple very seriously. As King, He expects that no one or nothing would be of greater importance to His followers than He is. He is the pearl of great price; He is the treasure in the field; He is the One for which we must abandon everything so we can be with Him. Jesus requires ultimate allegiance. This is why He says on many occasions, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23, NASB).

If you’re a knowledgeable Christian, that’s a good start. Maybe it’s time to leave the classroom and enter your apprenticeship by focusing on Jesus, embracing Him as King, living out His Kingdom life and asking Him to help you emulate and obey Him in every circumstance. I can’t wait to see where this journey leads us! ■



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