

June 2024

# MISSIONS

## Brazil Discipleship in the Amazon Rainforest

The US  
A Gospel Table for  
Community Colleges

France  
From God's Word  
to an Artist's Canvas

26 Below Retreats  
Our Identity in Christ





# THINKING IT THROUGH

BY BOB HAYES

## The Unimaginable Blessing of Fellow Believers

I love being with fellow believers. That joy super expands when I visit family members serving abroad. There, fellowship is a divine commodity seldom wasted. But, whether here or there, fellowship can suffer when we behave sinfully. Paul deals with this reality in 2 Corinthians 5:16–21.

### A new perspective

First, Paul tells us to regard fellow believers as more than their current behavior—in light of their standing in Christ, not their temporal failures: “Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.” (v. 16)

Disappointment with other believers can hit hard. While believers’ sinful choices may grieve us, we can shift our perspective to see them as the products of the change that comes with conversion. With Christ in us, our immaterial part is the biggest part of who we are, and that reality ought to weigh heavily on our considerations.

Note Paul’s reasoning in this verse. While we know about Christ’s earthly life, we now know Him as the risen, glorified Christ at the Father’s right hand. “[Paul] stops not at the manger or the cross,” writes A. W. Tozer in *The Warfare of the Spirit*, “but constantly sweeps our thoughts on to the resurrection and upward to the ascension and the throne.”<sup>1</sup> We praise God for Jesus’s birth, sinless life, suffering, and death, but Christ is no longer a baby, nor is He the despised, bleeding Servant. He is no longer in the grave. We know Him no longer “according to the flesh.”

Living 20 hours from my parents, I did not participate in my father’s care while he was dying. My mother and three siblings did. They probably still regard my dad in light of that terrible experience. But I don’t. I regard him as I last saw him: a vibrant, fun, talkative guy.

Paul reminds us that as we do not consider Christ *only* according to His earthly sojourn, we must stop recognizing one another in view of present struggles. Why do we still say “Simon the Sorcerer” instead of just “Simon”? Believers are more than sinning children of God.

### From death unto life

Paul furthers his admonition by affirming believers’ new state before God. We are new creations in Christ: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (v. 17)

The “old things” are probably our pre-conversion guilt before God, not our post-conversion sins. We trust that our sinful behavior has grown dimmer since conversion, but this verse emphasizes our state over our behaviors. Even though we still sin, our inner corruption and our sins are forgiven. So acknowledge fellow believers’ new state before God.

### The restored relationship

Additionally, we have a new life source: “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” (vv. 18–19)

Reconciliation is not synonymous with justification. It means “not imputing their trespasses to them.” God is the reconciler; believers are the messengers; the world is the scope. Christ’s death satisfies God’s demands related to Adam’s sin, whereas the unbelievers’ judgment is for personal sins (see the great white throne). In reconciliation, Christ’s death makes people “savable” because Christ took on the penalty for the imputed sin of Adam—He became “sin for us.” (v. 21) Therefore, we can rightly tell anyone, “Christ died for you.” His death addressed the world’s guilt in Adam’s sin but did not forgive its personal sins. Believers, however, received forgiveness for their sins at salvation, so their relationship with God has been restored.

Conclusion? Meaningful Christian fellowship can be difficult because we, as humans, are difficult. But, considering this passage, let’s give each other the highest consideration. Recognize believers as new creations in Christ that have new value to the Lord and us. When disappointed, address the sin but value the new creation. This will encourage those struggling and brighten our perspective. ■

*Bob Hayes is a commended worker based in New Jersey.*

<sup>1</sup> Tozer, *The Warfare of the Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 32.

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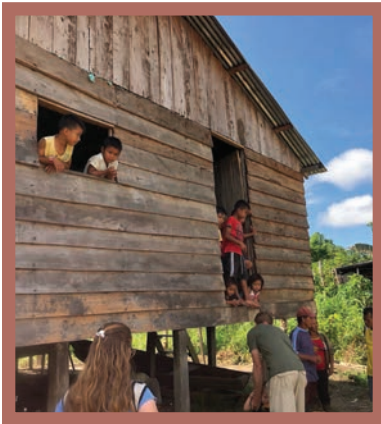
COVER PHOTO: Marajó Island, Amazon River, Brazil—©AdobeStock



# Spiritual Challenges in the Brazilian Amazon

TAKING DISCIPLESHIP AND BIBLE TEACHING TO REMOTE LOCATIONS

BY EZRA & JOANNA BRAINARD



*Deep in the hot, humid Amazon Rainforest of western Brazil lies Benjamin Constant. The Brainards call this crowded town their Brazilian home and ministry base. Yet they also serve the surrounding jungle villages that dot the Amazon River's tributaries.*

Pedro lives in a village of homesteaders, about 10 miles outside our town, down a muddy clay road. Crajari is one of many farming villages in our municipality. Unlike most of these villages, however, Crajari is not on the river and often is accessible only on foot or horseback.

Around here, Pedro and his family are known as Ribeirinhos, a term that means "little river people." Descendants of early European settlers, the Portuguese-speaking Ribeirinhos are not an Indigenous people, but they lead similarly primitive lifestyles, they share some of the same superstitions, and many have married into Indigenous families. Ribeirinhos are predominantly nominal Roman Catholics, but most have a synchronistic belief system—a mixture of Catholicism and Indigenous superstition.

Yet Pedro is no longer bound by these superstitions. Like Cornelius of old, he was God-fearing even before he came to understand the Gospel, and when local missionaries began holding services in his village, he also had a vision. In his dream, an angel came to him and told him to make sure he and his family read the Bible and listened to the preaching because through the Scripture and the preaching of it, they would find the way of salvation.

Pedro, unable to read for himself, urged his literate family members to read the Bible, and he faithfully attended the

missionaries' meetings. Slowly but surely, Pedro came to understand the gospel message. In 2020, shortly after we came into the picture, we had the joy of witnessing this dear believer publicly demonstrate his faith by baptism in his mother's fishing pond. (His mother was a devout Roman Catholic.)

## The challenges of illiteracy and lifestyle

Like Pedro, some 20 percent of the population in our municipality is illiterate. Pedro lost his father when he was a teenager, and as the eldest son, he worked hard to help provide for his family so at least his siblings could get an education. His children and grandchildren have varying degrees of literacy.

The Ribeirinho lifestyle offers little need or opportunity for reading. Reading just isn't necessary to plant and harvest manioc and plantain, to fish and hunt, or to prepare and sell *farinha* (a food staple made from cassava). Additionally, literature is not easy to obtain, not even in the city. Books are expensive and in short supply.

Sadly, some of the most readily available written material is published by the region's cults, of which there are many. For example, the Israelite Church of the New Universal Covenant, a Peruvian cult rapidly gaining popularity here, gives away lots of pamphlets in Portuguese and Spanish.

**Above:** The hospitable Ribeirinhos love receiving visitors; Houses crowd the river's edge in Tabatinga, Brazil; This road leads to Crajari, an inland farming community.

Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists also freely distribute their books and study courses. If you show up in the home of a poor family that expresses interest in the things of God (and there are many), you may not find a Bible at all—for those are expensive—but you will find a Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society booklet or an Ellen G. White book.

Being illiterate presents Pedro with a challenge, but he does not let it become an excuse. Despite chronic pain and other health issues, he makes a significant effort to never miss a prayer meeting when one happens in his village, and he listens to any Bible teaching he can find. Pedro continues to grow in his hunger for God's Word. His desire is so strong that when we were on furlough in 2022 and a pastor showed up in the village promising to start a church, Pedro gave him some of his land. Pedro and his family even started constructing a building next to their home. Pedro was so excited to have a church house next door, where he and his family could regularly hear the Scriptures taught.

The more we learned about this "pastor," however, the more concerned we became. We prayed for Pedro a lot but couldn't do much more than that from a distance. We didn't have direct contact with Pedro and didn't know enough about this man to say anything particular. God mercifully allowed Pedro's family to see the man's true colors: he was shown to be a wolf preying on the poorest believers with promises of prosperity if they gave to his cause. It ended up being a teachable moment, though it was a difficult way to learn.

### The challenge of weak doctrine

Over the last 100 years, the Gospel has spread rapidly throughout the Amazon, and church buildings that missionary teams built are a common sight to anyone traveling down the rivers. This is largely thanks to the Assemblies of God in Brazil, which is very outreach-minded and quick to send even fairly new converts to start churches in remote villages. Many people have come to Christ through the Gospel being spread this way.

While very evangelistic, the Assemblies of God is not as strong on doctrine. Many of these fresh converts are left without discipleship, without a grounding in God's Word, and without a sturdy defense against the abundance of cults and false teachers, such as the one Pedro encountered. Some fall prey to these cults. Others may recognize that the teachings are wrong but do not have a solid answer as to why. This leaves them in an unsteady, vulnerable place, clinging to the truth but unable to defend it.

*The National Catholic Reporter* has projected that evangelicals will become more numerous than Catholics in Brazil by 2032.<sup>1</sup> That would, of course, be a huge feat for a South American country should it come to fruition. While Pentecostal denominations like the Assemblies of God have been instrumental in many coming to faith in Christ alone for salvation, a great many more Brazilians are simply participating in what might be called a cultural revolution. We rejoice when the Gospel is preached, whether in pretense or truth, but we mourn the baggage of poor doctrine and what is, generally speaking, a more emotionally than biblically driven religion.



**Above (from top, L-R):** In this Ribeirinho home, believers participate in a prayer meeting; Ezra preaches in a village church building that's rarely used because few know the Bible well enough to preach—construction is easy but discipleship is hard; Every home collects water in giant bins; The community shops in the local farmers' market, which runs year round; This is a typical farming village on the river.

The prosperity gospel has deep inroads in the culture of Amazonian evangelicalism. The thought that God will heal any sickness, resolve any problem, and grant prosperity if you just “have faith” is rampant, even among believers who do not hold the entirety of the prosperity-gospel error. When God answers prayers differently than what was hoped for, true believers accept it. Yet that difference fused with the prosperity gospel’s ideas contributes to a mentality that God is just like the corrupt local government—making big promises without fulfilling half of them. This perspective demoralizes even true believers and leads many people to give half-hearted mental assent to the Gospel, as it appears untrustworthy.

### Tools for the challenge of remoteness

When we first arrived in Benjamin Constant, we planned to focus our ministry on remote villages even farther up the Amazon River (and we still hope we can do that one day). We came here thinking that the abundance of churches and the number of professing believers in town indicated less need for laborers right here. But we have become increasingly burdened about the huge need for discipleship, Bible teaching, and resources for believers in this municipality alone—including Benjamin Constant and the jungle villages, such as Pedro’s home, Crajari. We have found a few tools to be helpful in this regard:

- **Audio Bible players:** These “Bible talkers” are solar powered and easy to navigate. We carefully distribute them to individuals who are hungry for the Word of God but unable to read it, such as Pedro.
- **Emmaus correspondence courses:** Around 20 courses have been translated into Portuguese, with more in the works. We use the Emmaus app for group Bible studies and recommend it to individuals.
- **King of Glory:** This resource from ROCK International has been a big blessing. We use the *King of Glory* film, book, and study guide.

We also try to make Bibles more accessible in our area, especially large-print Bibles since poor vision is common. We sell Bibles as affordably as possible, accepting homegrown produce or eggs as payment. We give some Bibles away if needed. However, we avoid giving away expensive Bibles because many would be tempted to turn around and sell them for quick cash. We also always look for other sound biblical resources in Portuguese to give away or sell cheaply. The main challenge, greater than cost, is the logistics of getting anything shipped here. We live in a remote and isolated region—only accessible by air and river travel, mostly the latter—so getting anything shipped here is just plain difficult, not to mention costly.

### Wisdom for the right strategy

The problem of discipleship and Bible teaching continues to become more evident to us, but developing the right strategy to tackle it is hard. We need wisdom. We also need God’s strength to persevere. Seeing the needs is overwhelming, and the results from the labor of discipleship are mostly seen over time. By God’s grace, we’ve witnessed some fruit, but there’s so much work to do. Pray that God will send more laborers from afar and nearby. Pray that He will raise up men and women who are grounded in the Bible and apt to teach and disciple others.

Pray for wisdom! Pray for perseverance! Pray for laborers! ■



*Ezra and Joanna Brainard are commended from Emmaus Bible Chapel in Ferguson, Missouri.*

<sup>1</sup> Eduardo Campos Lima, “As Evangelicals Gain, Catholics on Verge of Losing Majority in Brazil,” *The National Catholic Reporter*, 5 February 2020, [NCROnline.org/news/evangelicals-gain-catholics-verge-losing-majority-brazil](https://www.ncronline.org/news/evangelicals-gain-catholics-verge-losing-majority-brazil).

**Right (from top):** Children as young as eight learn to get around in canoes; Many homes are built on stilts to avoid flood damage in the rainy season.



# FROM A TABLE TO THE HEART

## A Gospel Team Engages Muslim Students in Chicago's Community Colleges

BY KEVIN SCHILTZ

*The Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. (Isaiah 61:11)*

**"N**o, thank you. I am Muslim and am not supposed to read the Bible. . . . But what is it exactly?"

Our team frequently hears comments like this at community-college campuses in the Chicago area. With Luca Drago and Girish Sivasankaran, collaborators from nearby assemblies, we have seen the Lord open doors to presenting the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to immigrant and international students from around the world.

Every month, mosques, community centers, Islamic schools, and *halal* restaurants and grocery stores pop up throughout the vast Chicagoland metropolitan area. Community colleges present a strategic opportunity to engage unreached peoples, especially Muslims, as both international students and immigrants converge there for study and connections in this global city.

According to the ministry Open Doors, more than 20,000 international students study at institutions around Chicago, the majority coming from countries within the 10/40 Window.<sup>1</sup> In just one of these community colleges, a very large and growing percentage of the students are Arab Muslims.

### A strategy for attracting attention

Many Muslims have little Bible knowledge but genuine curiosity, stemming from a confusion within Islam itself. Muslims are told from childhood that Christians have twisted the meaning of the Scriptures. Yet the Quran does instruct them to read the Injil, the Arabic word for the Gospels or, more broadly, the New Testament. Our team has found that by decorating a table with traditional scarves, small table flags from around the world, and Bibles in many languages, a busy campus corridor can become a place where students can hear about Jesus. At each colorful Bible table we set up, done with each academic institution's consent, we have the privilege of inviting people, especially Muslims, to read the New Testament and hear of God's love for them.

Using New Testaments and individual gospels in more than a dozen languages, we have engaged hundreds of students from around the world, many of whom have never interacted with a

Christian. The list of languages draws the attention of reached to some of the world's most unreached people groups: Spanish, French, Polish, Portuguese, Ukrainian, Russian, Chinese, Arabic, Turkish, Hindi, Urdu, Farsi, Dari, and Kurdish. Yet many students prefer to have an English translation. The offer of individually wrapped candy helps attract students who may otherwise continue walking to lunch or their next class. A stack of brightly colored stickers for decorating laptops and water bottles encourages students to stop and browse as we establish a connection.

### Friendly connections and deep conversations

When our team interacts with these students, conversations about cultures, languages, experiences, and college life are frequent launching points into deeper conversations about the Savior. International and immigrant students tend to quickly jump into spiritual topics when given the chance to do so in the otherwise "religion-free" atmosphere of American colleges.

Once, an especially confident young woman in a *hijab* (headscarf) approached the table and asked my teammates if they were giving out the *real* Bible. The student reported widespread interest in spiritual conversation on campus, especially among the more recent Arab Muslim immigrants. Besides this exciting news, she explained that, during the previous semester, a group of false Christians had been using Bible study invitations to lure students into becoming part of a cult. Though the administration expelled the wolves from campus, their influence left some reluctance among these Muslim students.

I lived in the Arab world for nearly 10 years. Since I transitioned to the States, these campus events have been an opportunity for me to use my Arabic language skills and experience the shift to reaching Muslims in the United States. It's incredible how a few Arabic phrases can warmly attract the curious and disarm the antagonists. Similarly, Amy, my wife, uses her fluency in Turkish to interact with international students who come to our home and with those she meets around town.

## Questions that open doors

Here is a sampling of the conversations our team has had:

- “I heard Christians say that Jesus died for our sins. What does that even mean? This makes no sense to me as a Muslim!” This young Middle Eastern woman said she was not interested in free candy or a New Testament. She came just to hear an explanation of this statement, which, of course, we happily talked about.
- An Arab man asked about the Old Testament, which he had started reading with curiosity and then enthusiasm. “It reads so different from the Quran. What do not eating pork and long genealogies have to do with Jesus?”
- A student who had recently immigrated from Iraq browsed the books and said, “I bet you don’t have anything here in my native language!” referring to Behdini Kurdish. Though we didn’t, we now have a New Testament in this language.
- Two women approached the table asking if we had resources about Islam and women. Having seen the Arabic Bible on our table, they thought we might have some association with the Islamic club. The women understood quickly that this information promoted the Bible, not Islam. One of them was in a relationship with a Muslim man but hesitated to consider marriage because she was concerned that Islam does not uphold women’s rights.
- Upon noticing all our flags, a man from Benin asked the team if anyone knew where his country was located on the globe. After we talked about Africa, he said, “I am a Muslim. Am I allowed to read the Injil? Do you have a copy in French that I could have?”

## Hopes and prayers for the future

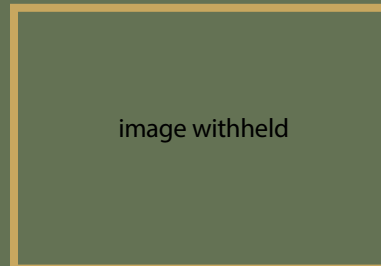
Since we have engaged with so many international students, the Lord has now put on our hearts a vision to open an international student house and ministry center: a place where members of various Chicagoland assemblies may show hospitality to and care for international students while exposing them to the Christian faith and the Bible. Pray with us that this will become a reality in the coming months.

Please pray that the students who have taken Bibles over the past year will read them. We are also building relationships with several who return with many questions. Pray that their questions about God and their sin will be like pebbles in their shoes—something they cannot ignore. We pray that many will come to Christ with their burden of sin and believe on Him. We continue sowing and watering the seeds by faith in the God who sends us and strengthens us. ■

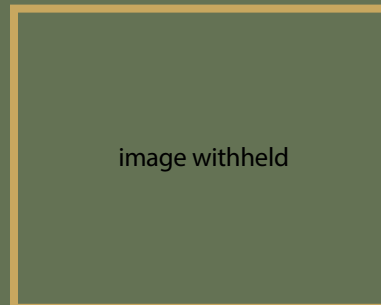


*Kevin and Amy Schiltz are commended from Lombard Gospel Chapel in Lombard, Illinois.*

<sup>1</sup>“Open Doors International Students Data, 2022/23,” *Open Doors*, [OpenDoorsData.org/data/international-students/all-places-of-origin/](https://OpenDoorsData.org/data/international-students/all-places-of-origin/).



Community colleges present a strategic opportunity to engage unreached peoples, especially Muslims.



**Above (from top, L-R):** Luca Drago (left) engages a student in friendly conversation after giving him a Gospel of John; Kevin (at right) has found that Muslim students are often the most eager to get into spiritual conversations; The globe and flags catch the attention of international students, such as this man eagerly pointing out his home country; Kevin (from the US) and Girish Sivasankaran (from India) serve as an international team that reaches internationals in Chicagoland; The Schiltzes enjoy opening their home to international students—many would never have an opportunity to visit an American home otherwise; Amy (at left) enjoys connecting with young Turkish and Arab women.

# Investing Skills in the Gospel

## The Vast Short-Term Mission Field Before Us

BY STEVEN PRICE



After the Israel-Hamas war canceled a trip to Israel that I had planned for the beginning of 2024, the Lord opened a door for a different type of trip: scouting for future short-term missions efforts. This was the goal John Peasland (CMML's executive director) and I (CMML's medical adviser) had as we met in Istanbul with plans to visit ministries in Moldova and Turkey. What we did not anticipate was the magnitude of vision that this excursion would cause us to consider.

However, I am getting ahead of myself. As I mentioned, our goal was to obtain an assessment of needs and insight into what temporary assistance a small team or an individual from the West might contribute. The results would then contribute to the development of a template for finite mission expeditions to the established mission field.

### Are short-term laborers in the Bible?

The Bible includes minimal direct evidence of short-term labors in the New Testament, but we do have some indirect data to support the notion of a mission trip. For example, Paul's first missionary journey may have been as brief as four months and as long as 10 months.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, several people, such as Dr. Luke—whom I, as a doctor, consider a colleague—accompanied Paul for finite periods. Although the author of Acts, our beloved physician doesn't include himself as part of a missionary team

until Acts 16:10–12, when he appears with the second missionary team, traveling from Troas to Philippi (about AD 49). Soon after, he disappears from the narrative until Acts 20:5, during the return leg to Jerusalem (AD 54–57). Finally, Dr. Luke is rediscovered with Paul as he accompanies a military escort to Rome in Acts 27:1 (about AD 59–62).

Each incident indicates a short period when Dr. Luke traveled with the world's first-known missionary.<sup>2</sup> Others, such as Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, and Aquila and Priscilla, all followed a similar trend (Acts 20:4, 18:18). The notation is obvious: a host of early believers had limited touchpoints with the mission field through Paul. This pattern bears consideration, if not duplication, today.

### What skills are needed?

It is not as if short-term missions work is absent from the current Christian horizon. Rather, it may be less visible in the daylight of US assembly evangelical work. Our Europe-Asia trip was designed to reset the paradigm.

Indeed, our imagination could not keep pace with what we saw. In the area of Moldova we visited, we witnessed at least 10 venues in which skill sets may be employed to increase the footprint of the Gospel. The most noticeable opportunity, to me, was the demand for short-term medical work. In Cahul,

Moldova



From left: A team member walks to the home of an elderly person—some conditions are worse than others; On each visit, the elderly receive kind words, medication, food, and prayers; John Peasland (left) and Steve Price (right) meet with the chief of police in Cahul to develop a relationship for ministry opportunities; Kids enjoy a ministry just for them.

under the auspices of the local assembly and missionaries, we serviced the shut-in elderly and the populace of undocumented Russians. Their subculture has neglected its elderly. Many of them have been deposited into shelters that are called apartments but that would hardly pass an occupancy code in the West. These people are simply waiting to enter eternity. The Russian population has no available government services since they are not part of the administration's census. Their hardship is glaring and heart wrenching.

Such was the case with countless other avenues of service we observed, which need teachers, skilled craftsmen, firefighters, and children's workers. At times, the demands seemed to echo from our hearts to the bone.

However, what we saw in Moldova was merely a foreshadowing of the plight we saw in Antakya, Turkey—once the ancient Antioch of Syria, where Paul and Barnabas were commissioned to be the church's first missionary team (Acts 13:1–4). We arrived nearly on the one-year anniversary of the 7.5 magnitude earthquake. We witnessed communities' "shell shock" as they recalled the 75 percent of their city blocks lost in the rubble and an equal number of neighbors lost and never found.

The earthquake had occurred at 4:00 a.m. in the middle of winter with the result of utter darkness and no heat. At the time, the local and foreign believers had set about to do relief work aimed, at first, at simple survival—such as a tent to sleep in or a blanket to stay warm under. Over the last year, the modes of service have evolved to provide for food, clothing, and hygiene needs. Today, the assembly mission relief work includes an efficient system of erecting suitable living structures for a family or two. Most of those who had lost their homes had begun living in tents or leaky converted shipping containers. The tiny home project addresses their need. Thousands of homes have been built, yet the waiting list contains approximately 4,000 families.<sup>3</sup>

Their gratefulness is enough to fill a bowl with one's tears. All such efforts merely prompt the recipients to ask, "Why are

you doing what you are doing?" They remark that the government is unable to help and the mega relief organizations have moved on but the Christians remain. Thus, they become seekers of Christianity to find out the hope that resides within the believer (1 Peter 3:15).

### Will you contribute your skill set?

During our trip, it became abundantly clear that one could assemble a team of six to eight people and spend a week of the year in a place like Turkey, building 30 houses and encouraging souls to seek Christ. The work would be done in tandem with the embedded missionary, who could then follow up with the recipients of such blessings to share the Gospel and further demonstrations of Christ's love.

These eyewitness accounts galvanized our thinking, and we now seek to revive the call to missions generally and to short-term missions specifically. Yet this is the mere tip of the iceberg. In our circles, we have countless skill sets waiting to be employed in foreign or domestic fields and to become the calling card to Christ. My field is medicine, but what is your expertise?

Many of us sit on training that could be used to assist missionaries in building projects or IT dilemmas or vast education needs. What would be the harm in consecrating our vacation to service somewhere in the world or on a missions frontline at home? What the mission field needs is not more skill development but a willingness to surrender to God's call and go make disciples. It is perfectly in step with the tenor of our Lord's Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20.

If the Lord has generated a spark of desire in your soul, we encourage three things: dedicated private prayer about your burden, group prayer with your church leadership, and possible consultation with CMML, which might assist in determining needs and direction. I look forward to seeing you on such a field. ■

Steven Price, CMML medical adviser

<sup>1</sup> Dennis McCallum, "A Chronological Study of Paul's Ministry," *Dwell Community Church*, [DwellCC.org/essays/chronological-study-pauls-ministry](http://DwellCC.org/essays/chronological-study-pauls-ministry). <sup>2</sup> Kevin Rogers, "Luke's Eye-Witness Accounts in Acts," *Investigator*, no. 153 (November 2013): n.p., [Ed5015.tripod.com/BActsWeSections153.html](http://Ed5015.tripod.com/BActsWeSections153.html). <sup>3</sup> Learn more: [CMML.us/video/turkey-earthquake-update](http://CMML.us/video/turkey-earthquake-update).

Turkey



From left: The February 2023 earthquake devastated Antakya; A group visits a tent city where earthquake survivors now live; Inside a tiny home, John Peasland (center) learns about the project's work and needs.

# MK CORNER

Missions Magazine Chats with Missionary Kids

## INTERVIEW WITH THE PARK SIBLINGS Cambodia, Day 6

BY SARAH DUNLAP

Early one morning, I looked into the Zoom window on my computer screen, waiting for Grace, Joanna, Joshua, and David Park to appear. Despite knowing their parents, Insun and Youmi Park, I had never met these siblings but was eager to. After we overcame a connection issue and some nerves, the siblings' sweet, funny personalities shone, and we had a blast talking about their lives in Phnom Penh, Cambodia—which they all agreed is a very crowded, very busy city. As Joanna noted during our conversation, a joy of missions is getting to know people. That includes not only the people we minister to but also our fellow believers, old and young. I hope you enjoy getting to know Grace, Joanna, Joshua, and David as much as I did.

### Do you go to school, or are you home-schooled?

**All:** Go to school!

**Joanna:** It's Hope International School, and it's a Christian school, and we live near it, and it's very good, and it's fun, and there's lots of friends and lots of people we can play with and talk with.

### What are your favorite subjects?

**Grace:** I like art and PE.

**Joanna:** I mostly like art, drama, and maybe PE. And ICT.

**Joshua:** I like ICT, PE, and integrating.

**Grace:** ICT is like computer time, where you learn more about the internet and network.

**David:** I like PE and art and drama.

### Do you speak any languages besides English?

**Joanna:** Korean, Khmer—

**Joshua:** And Cambodian!

**Joanna:** Cambodian!

**David:** And we also speak English.

**Grace:** So we only know two languages besides English: Cambodian and Korean. [*The Cambodian language is Khmer.*]



Joshua (9), David (5), Joanna (10), and Grace (12)

### Can you teach us to say hi in Khmer? Bye?

**Joanna:** *Chomreab suor.*

**Grace:** *Chomreab suor* is, like, a formal way of saying hello.

**Joanna:** And *chomreab lear* means goodbye.

### What's your favorite thing to do with your family?

**Grace:** On Saturdays, we usually spend time with our family. Sometimes, we watch a movie.

**David:** Or eat dinner sometimes outside.

**Joanna:** Sometimes, in the morning, my dad, Grace, Joshua, and I ride bikes to a restaurant, and then my mom and brother drive.

**Grace:** We usually eat Cambodian noodles that we really like, and Joanna likes toast—like American breakfast.

### What are your favorite Cambodian foods?

**Grace:** I like Cambodian noodles. It's, like, kind of sour but really nice and hot. There are all kinds: seafood, pork, meat. I like the seafood kind.

**Joanna:** I like Cambodian noodles the most.

**Joshua:** I like noodles—Cambodian noodles.

**David:** I like Cambodian, um, . . . rice and chicken.

### Any favorite American foods?

**Joanna:** I like PIZZA!

**Joshua:** I like french fries.

**Grace:** I'm not sure. I don't really have a favorite, but I like burgers.

**David:** French fries! I like pasta too.

### Are there any Cambodian foods you don't like?

**Grace:** Well, it's not an actual food [to us], but it's fried tarantulas and snakes on sticks. We've never tried them before, and we don't want to. [*These are common street foods in Cambodia.*]

**Joanna:** And I don't like vegetable soup.

**Joshua:** A Cambodian food I don't like is fried frog.

**David:** I don't like . . . cockroach. [*Certain insects are also fried and sold as snacks by Cambodian street vendors.*]

### Tell me about your church in Cambodia.

**Grace:** So, to go to our church, we have to ride this ferry across the Mekong River. [The area is] very different from the city we live in—like no cement roads and stuff. We used to do Sunday school, but because of COVID-19, we stopped for a while.

**Joanna:** And we have friends there. Like two blocks next to us, we have a friend—a Cambodian, half-Australian girl. [She] usually comes to our church, but sometimes she doesn't. And there are Cambodian friends we have in front of our church.

### What do you like to do with your friends for fun?

**Joanna:** I usually like to play a board game. Or someone comes to my house, or I go to their house, and we pretend to shop. We play games outside.

**Grace:** For me, I like to sometimes draw or do other activities together. Or just talk.

**Joshua:** I like to play sports with friends.

**David:** I like to play sports, and I like to play in the playground with friends.

### Do you have any pets?

**Grace:** We have a parrot—a green, loud, noisy parrot.

**Joanna:** It's called an Alexandra parrot [or *Alexandrine*]. We call it Pe Pe.

**Grace:** It doesn't talk to us, but it wakes us up in the morning.

**Joanna:** It squawks.

**David:** It squawks like, "Lolly, lolly, lolly!"

**Joshua:** It wants food.

**David:** Yeah! But, when we give it food, it doesn't eat.

### What do you like about being a missionary kid?

**Joanna:** For me, maybe talking about life in their country and talking and making friends and talking about what they like to do—to know about them.

**Joshua:** And we can spread the Gospel.

### What's difficult about being an MK?

**Grace:** Sometimes, we miss our family in Korea.

**Joanna:** Sometimes, when you go to other churches, there are too many mosquitoes and stuff. I like visiting other churches, but I don't know, there can be too many mosquitoes. Or we stay too long.

### If you could have any job when you're older, what would you want to be?

**Grace:** I want to be an author and an illustrator.

**Joanna:** I want to be a doctor or an illustrator or someone who makes Google art or art for games.

**Joshua:** I want to be a doctor for animals and a policeman.

**David:** And I want to be a soccer player, doctor, policeman, and a vet—and a firefighter!

### And where would you want to live?

**Joshua:** Live somewhere else! I'm just joking. [Everyone laughs.]

**Grace:** Because we are used to living in Cambodia, I think I would prefer Cambodia—I think; I'm not sure.

**Joanna:** For me, I might want to live in Korea or, I don't know, maybe America.

**Joshua:** I don't know where I'm going to go, but I'll just go for Korea.

**David:** I'd like to go to China, Korea, and Cambodia.

### Do you have any prayer requests?

**Grace:** Pray that other people who don't believe can have a chance and open their ears and eyes so they can know more about God and believe.

**Joanna:** And pray for the four of us to know Jesus more and to help our mom and dad as missionaries and to help other Cambodian kids to get inspired with Jesus. ■



From top (L-R): Joshua talks to his parrot, Pe Pe; Grace (left) hangs out with her friends; Joanna (left) warms up with her school's cross-country team; Dressing up as storybook characters is fun; David enjoys Cambodian noodles.

# 26<sup>CMML</sup> BELOW

Retreats  
in 2024

# EXPLORING OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

BY CRAIG FRITCHEY

Each year, various camps, youth groups, and regional assemblies host amazing events tailor-made for their teens and young adults. But the demand continues to grow for CMML's 26 Below Retreats, gatherings that bring together youth from across regional assemblies and challenge the next generation to serve the Lord.

Last year, we launched a new era of 26 Below Retreats following the COVID-19 pandemic. And, in 2024, we added a fourth retreat to our schedule: Southwest 26 Below in Denton, Texas. We will continue re-evaluating how CMML can best serve the youth in our assemblies through 26 Below in 2025 and beyond.

The theme for this year's 26 Below Retreats was "Identity." As our culture seeks to convince us that our identity is found in how we feel, where we work, what we enjoy, or whom we are attracted to, Scripture tells us our identity is in Christ. This year's retreats sought to help youth understand who they are in Him and how that works out in their daily lives.

The new era of 26 Below continues to surprise us. Previously, we had a good idea of which assemblies would send their young people. We could accurately guess the number that would come, their age range, and even their level of spiritual interest. However, post-pandemic, everything has been different. We're seeing a new, diverse generation of youth from an array of assemblies attend our four regional retreats.

Some of the retreats were smaller this year, while others grew. Many of our faithful supporting assemblies sent their youth again, and many other assemblies heard about 26 Below and sent groups for the first time—including cross-cultural assemblies that speak languages other than English in their church gatherings. This diversity reminded us of the promise in Revelation 7:9 that "all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues" will worship the Lamb. No matter our background, all believers' identities are found in Christ.

## Northeast 26 Below

Stevens, Pennsylvania

Our original 26 Below Retreat moved locations for the first time in its history—from Upstate New York to southeastern Pennsylvania. Refreshing Mountain Retreat and Adventure Center, located closer to our core base of attendees, provided new activities (such as axe throwing and escape rooms) and a beautiful atmosphere (complete with Christmas lights) for fellowship. Coming from as far north as Rhode Island and as far south as Virginia, some 150 young people attended the event in mid-January. Dr. Steve Price (CMML medical adviser) brought identity-themed Bible teaching from Philippians 3 and Ephesians 1. Luca Drago from Warrenville Bible Chapel in Illinois brought missions-themed ministry, highlighting the great gospel needs around the world. Additionally, Lauren Drago, Luca's wife, led a session on identity in Christ for women, while Steve Price led a similar men's session.



## Midwest 26 Below

Dayton, Iowa

Historically our largest retreat, Midwest 26 Below turned out to be about half its usual size this year. However, the quality of the attendees' fellowship and their seriousness about following Christ was encouraging. To this late-February retreat, Steven Harrell (North Carolina) brought passionate Bible teaching that examined the identity of Christ as presented in the Gospels. He also challenged everyone to allow the Holy Spirit to build these qualities into their own lives. Luca Drago joined this retreat as well—this time, with his youth group in tow—and brought missions-focused ministry. One of the sweetest aspects of Midwest



was the seasons of prayer for the missionaries and unreached people groups listed in the 2024 *Missionary Prayer Handbook*. Attendees learned about the 3.4 billion unreached people in our world, which deeply affected them. Please pray the Lord will send many of them into His harvest.

## Southeast 26 Below

Travelers Rest, South Carolina

Started in 2020, Southeast 26 Below continues to grow. In late March, we were encouraged to see assemblies bringing groups of teens from a variety of states, including Tennessee, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Georgia, Florida, and, surprisingly, Michigan. Jon Glock (Legacy Ministry Services) focused his teaching on Galatians 2:20 and the implications of our co-crucifixion with Christ. He juxtaposed this truth with our daily struggles with the flesh, as described in Romans 6. Paul and Carol Bramsen (MPH Day 27) joined us, and Paul opened up a firehose of information about the amazing things the Lord is doing all over the world as He builds His church. Attendees left challenged to engage in Christ's mission locally and globally.



## Southwest 26 Below

Denton, Texas

As we planned our first 26 Below event in Texas for mid-April, chatter and interest were high, but registrations came in slowly. Additionally, our scheduled speaker, Christian Ramirez (MPH Day 20), who serves in Colombia, experienced visa issues that prevented him from attending in person. However, he filmed a short video to share what the Lord had placed on his heart regarding the theme. We are grateful Brady Collier (Discipleship Intern Training Program) stepped in as our main speaker and covered the teaching on identity. John Peasland (CMML executive direc-



tor) also presented teaching sessions on missions, challenging our concept of unreached people groups, the role employment can play in evangelism, and the attention we give to reaching the lost. In the end, a terrific group of young people chose to come and give 26 Below a chance. We trust it was a blessing for all.

## Get ready for Nationwide 26 Below!

This year, 26 Below reminded us that the mission of CMML—to advance the spread of the Gospel globally—is still needed. While many have come to Christ, so many nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues have yet to hear that Jesus saves and that He can redefine their identity. We look forward to how the Lord will call those who attended 26 Below to fulfill this mission.

Visit our YouTube channel to watch video recordings of most messages from the 26 Below Retreats. And mark your calendars for October 26, 2024! Our annual Nationwide 26 Below hybrid event is coming to youth groups across the continent. Visit [CMML.us/26below](https://CMML.us/26below) for more information. ■

*Craig Fritchey, CMML assembly relations and conference coordinator*

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# De La Parole à la Peinture

FROM GOD'S WORD  
TO AN ARTIST'S CANVAS



BY JEAN-LUC & JEANNIE TABAILLOUX

Throughout the centuries, great artists have painted scenes from the Bible that have helped people understand the purposes of God. Today, those masterpieces continue to inspire us and challenge our understanding of the Grand Story.

Recently, we arranged to have a traveling art exhibition, called *De La Parole à la Peinture* ("from word to painting"), come to our area of France, Grenoble, and we organized a local event. The producers of this exhibition selected 21 reproductions of famous artworks to represent creation, the fall, redemption, and restoration.

The reproductions were on display for one week in our village. As viewers perused the exhibition, handheld audio-guide devices delivered a description of each masterpiece and its theological significance. About 30 volunteers from local churches welcomed visitors from 10:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. daily.

Throughout the week, more than 350 people visited the exhibition, including several elected city officials. Then, on four evenings that week, Jean-Luc led gatherings where he spoke about four of the masterpieces and the biblical texts that inspired them. The main idea was to introduce seekers to the answers the Bible offers to the great existential questions everyone asks at some point in his or her lifetime. About 150 people came to ponder the artworks and the related biblical texts.

We started with a painting on creation from Jan Brueghel. We read excerpts from Genesis 1–2 and tried to answer the classic questions: Where do we come from? Who are we? Do we have inherent worth? What is the purpose of our existence?

Next, we went over the fall, focusing on Michelangelo's fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. We read excerpts from Genesis 3, and then, we answered another question: Where do evil, injustice, suffering, and death come from?

On the third evening, we worked with a piece by Marc Chagall. We talked about the gift of the Ten Commandments. We asked: Can we really find freedom through the law of God? Can His laws save us from ourselves? We showed how the good commandments, far from saving us, emphasize our desperate need for forgiveness—how they point us toward Christ, the promised Savior and Redeemer.

We finished the series by meditating on the prodigal son story as painted by Rembrandt. We asked: Who will save us from ourselves? Where will we find true redemption?

After each session, we held a Q&A time so the audience could ask Jean-Luc their spiritual questions. The Gospel was thus presented from a cultural point of view by walking through the Grand Story one famous painting at a time and answering questions.

In our guest book and in conversations, many visitors expressed gratitude for the visual lessons they encountered. One couple said, "We keep coming back because we have never heard these things before. It's all new to us." Another person commented, "For the first time, I understand the story of the prodigal son."

We are thankful that this event proclaimed the Grand Story to our village. Please pray for a renewed hunger for God's Word in Grenoble, France. ■



*Jean-Luc and Jeannie Tabailoux are commended from Lake Geneva Bible Chapel in Wisconsin.*

**From top:** The 21 masterpiece reproductions await visitors; Visitors take in the exhibition; Jean-Luc supplements the exhibition with a table of Christian literature.

# ETERNAL LOVE

EPHESIANS 1:4

By Krista Besselman

Before the world was framed or made,  
Before our parents disobeyed,  
Before we all, like sheep, had strayed,  
God knew His Son would be betrayed  
And treated like a slave.

Before this world had come to be,  
Before our sin and death's decree,  
God loved us from eternity.  
He knew the cost to set us free  
From sin and from the grave.

Before the debt could yet accrue,  
God saw the worst that we would do.  
He knew what Christ would suffer through.  
O, what a plan His mercy drew  
His enemies to save!

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