

June 2022

MISSIONS

An aerial photograph of a lush tropical river delta, likely in Central America, showing a complex network of blue waterways winding through dense green forest. In the upper right foreground, the white wing and a green-tipped wingtip of an airplane are visible, flying over the landscape. The sky is a clear, vibrant blue with a few wispy white clouds near the horizon.

KENYA to PERU

Learning to Trust
God's Plans

Paraguay
Shoeboxes, VBS,
and Blessings

Bahamas
The Road to Recovery

Mexico
Interview with
New Missionaries



THINKING IT THROUGH

BY TIMOTHY BEER

Freedom in Stillness

Be still, and know that I am God. (Psalm 46:10)

We all need the freeing reminder that our Christian life is not dependent on who we are or what we can do. Because of God's amazing grace, it instead depends completely upon who Jesus Christ is and what He can do (Philippians 2:13). We see this truth also presented in the words of John 15:5, "Without Me you can do nothing," and of Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

God gave a clear message of correction to the people of Israel through the prophet Jeremiah—a corrective that is also relevant to us today in our world of pride, wisdom, power, and riches. He stated that there is only one thing genuinely worth boasting in, which is to "truly know" Him and so to understand that He alone is God (Jeremiah 9:23–24, NLT).

This same theme of knowing God is clearly presented in Psalm 46. To enjoy this eternal reality that "I am God," we must

We need to daily lay aside our pride, effort, and wisdom so we look only to God.

trust in Him, depending completely upon Him (v. 10). While the world is full of busyness, noise, distractions, and entertainment, our Christian joy and freedom come

from being still in God's presence. Therefore, we need to daily lay aside our pride, effort, and wisdom so we look only to God.

This knowledge of God is not academic or intellectual; rather, it is spiritual and experiential. So it can only come from daily intimacy with God. Just like Enoch and others of old, we are blessed with the amazing privilege of daily walking in close fellowship with the God of the universe. No other religion or philosophy comes even close to this unique message of Christianity.

Psalm 46 tells of a world of chaos, fear, disaster, and warfare that is up to date with the current international situation.

And, then, the psalmist reminds us that God is our refuge and strength in times of trouble. He alone, through His glorious working, can bring this world's chaos and battles to an end.

While in our stillness we experience that He is God, we will see the practical fulfilment of the two promises of verse 10—"He" will be exalted among the nations" and "[He] will be exalted in the earth"—when we do the following:

First, we must prayerfully call upon Him for the huge spiritual needs of this world (1 Timothy 2:1–6). Clearly, the world is in physical chaos. Yet, more importantly, it is in absolute spiritual chaos. As we plead in accordance with God's desire for every person to be saved, He points us to the transforming power of the cross that is sufficient for all. In this stillness of dependency, we will be privileged to see God being "exalted among the nations" as people across the world come to personally experience that He is God.

Second, we must respond to His call for daily rest by being yoked together with him (Matthew 11:29–30). This will result in God being "exalted in the earth"—that is, in our daily lives. He is exalted when we depend upon His leadership to show us each step on our Christian pathway, walking side by side with Him in fellowship each day.

The last verse of Psalm 46 contains two beautiful guarantees of God's presence for those who take the time to be still before Him: "the Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us" and "the God of Israel is our fortress." (v. 11, NLT) Truly, we have nothing to fear because our God is the God of absolute power and authority, with all of heaven's armies at His command. We can confidently rest in His desire and ability to always be there for us. God's amazing grace is sufficient for every person. ■

Based in the US, Timothy Beer is a missionary with connections to Zambia.

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COVER PHOTO: Amazonas River, Iquitos, Peru—©iStockPhoto.com/Anna Chaplygina



HANDS OPEN, EYES ON GOD

Learning to Trust His Plans,
from Kenya to Peru



BY MINDY RAMIREZ

I joke with my husband now that I do not want to try planning anything about the future because God always changes my plans. But I have learned that the plans He has for me are so much better than my own. And God's plans for me over the last few years meant leaving my country of service, which I loved with all of my heart, and going to a land that He would show me—and not in my time frame but in His.

GOD LEADS ME OVERSEAS

In 2008, I had the privilege of student teaching in Nairobi, Kenya. I fell in love with the school and with the opportunity to walk to a nearby orphanage for babies. Then, after finishing my degree at Emmaus Bible College, I taught in a Christian school in the Dominican Republic for three years. I was excited when, in 2011, the door opened for me to return to Kenya. I knew I wanted to foster babies as well as teach.

Over six years, I cared for 18 babies in my home, one or two at a time. I also taught second grade for three years and, then, swimming for three years, and I served as the elementary chaplain for several of those years. Students attending that private school are of diverse nationalities and include missionary kids, ambassadors' children, businesspeople's children, and others.

After a few years there, I considered working with only the orphans, not in a school setting. But, every time I started to pursue that, God led me to stay at the school. In 2017, I started planning for a yearlong furlough. The two babies then in my home were adopted before I left for the States in August 2017, and I was promised the same job as director of the swimming program upon my return.



Left (from top): Kenya is full of natural beauty, something which Mindy was sad to leave behind; Over six years, Mindy fostered 18 children, including John, the boy she cared for the longest.

Right (from top): At the school where Mindy taught in Kenya, the road is trimmed with vibrant jacaranda trees; Mindy saw some of her foster babies, like Steve (pictured in her arms), find their "forever" families.

GOD ABRUPTLY CHANGES MY PLANS

In November 2017, however, while back in the States, I received an email stating that my job was no longer available. I was shocked, crushed, and hurt. I had no idea where I would go and felt unwanted. But even then, God knew just what I needed. When I received the email, I was staying at the CMML facility—surrounded by fellow believers who loved and believed in me and even some who knew what I was going through. They were patient with all my tears and listened to my hurts and stories.

Over the next few months, I spent a lot of time talking with God, and He showed me that my worth was not in being a missionary. My identity had mistakenly become *missionary*, not *child of God*. I concluded that if God called me back to the States, not to another country overseas, I would accept it because my identity in Him is secure. It was a long road but a worthwhile one.

Over those months, I spent a lot of time crying and missing my life in Kenya, but I also looked forward with hope to seeing where God would lead me. When I was at the CMML facility, I talked with a few people there about ministry opportunities, specifically with orphans or street kids.

IS GOD OPENING ANOTHER DOOR?

One advantage I had in looking for countries is that I spoke some Spanish due to having lived in the Dominican Republic. After communicating with an orphanage in Peru, I traveled there for a month in February and March 2018 to see if it was a good fit.

I loved my month there. My Spanish slowly returned after more than six years of not speaking any. I loved the kids and staff and enjoyed meeting people at church. The most surprising result of the trip, however, was meeting the orphanage administrator, a single guy also involved in the church connected with the orphanage. Since I would only be there for a month, we decided to pray about whether God wanted something for us, while staying in touch when I went back to the States. But the trip went really well, and all the doors were opening to return to Peru on a more permanent basis.

Next came the part I was both anticipating and dreading.



Since I had planned to return to Kenya, all my earthly belongings were being stored there for me. Also, I had only said goodbye for a year, not for forever. But, once again, God was clearly present in every part of it. A few days before I left

for Kenya in April, I was talking with a friend who had just lost her job. “Want to go to Kenya next week and help me sort and sell my stuff?” I asked, mostly joking. But she said yes. She could be more objective as I sorted through my things and figured out what to sell.

The time in Kenya was indeed painful but also healing as I said goodbye to the school, some of my students, my friends, and three of my last foster babies. I was sad to leave such a beautiful country, but I was thankful for the memories I had made. God also put some great friends into my life whom I am still friends with today. I worked through some of my hurt and saw that God did have a plan in all this.

GOD GIVES ME A TENDER PICTURE

Shortly before leaving, I traveled to the Kenyan coast for a few days to be still and talk to God, processing all that was happening in my life. During that time, He showed me a truth that has helped me immensely: In the past, when He gave me a gift,



I tended to either grab it out of His hands and hold on tightly, or throw it out, saying I didn’t want it. Instead of those reactions, God gave me another picture: I need to keep my hands open, palms up, and eyes on Him. He will care for whatever He places in

my hands if my eyes are on Him. We know He is the Father of all good gifts, and we can trust Him. So I put my possible relationship with Javier there, along with my future—with my eyes on Christ and my hands open, ready to receive and trust.

I came back to the States in mid-May and began saying goodbye because I had lived there for almost a year. I stayed with a wonderful, godly couple from my home church in Seattle, who were a balm to my weary soul. Every morning, I would hear them listening to God’s Word on the radio. We talked a lot about His plans and purposes for us and how much He cares about us. God was looking out for me in every way.

GOD CLOSES (AND OPENS) MORE DOORS

You may be wondering what happened with Javier. We kept talking while I was in the States and in Kenya, and we decided to pursue a relationship. I loved his heart for the kids at the orphanage and his happy personality (I can be intense and serious at times).

Left: In 2018, Mindy showed Tanya, who helped her pack up her life in Kenya, her new home: Peru. **Right:** At the Kenyan coast, God reminded Mindy of His faithfulness, helping her process the emotions of leaving her country of service.



At the end of July 2018, I moved to Peru, and slowly settled into life fully in Spanish. I lived at the orphanage those first few months and helped out in any area needed. I cleaned a lot of closets and spent a lot of time with the kids. I thought I would be at the orphanage for a long time, but God had other plans. After less than a year, God shut that door. He also shut the door for Javier to continue at the orphanage. It was difficult, but I



put into practice all the lessons God had taught me over the year and a half before.

God, as He always does, brought just the right people and the right ministry opportunities into my life. I soon joined an English-speaking Bible Study Fellowship group with missionaries from the area, something I couldn't do when I worked at the orphanage full time. Then, God opened doors for me to serve in other orphanages and ministries.

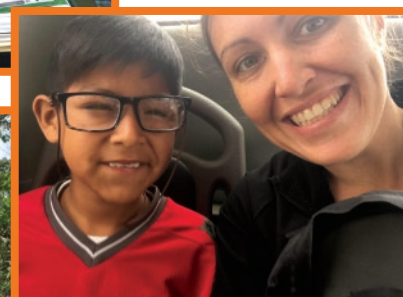
GOD IS ALWAYS WORKING

In August 2019, Javier and I married. I had come to Peru convinced I would be a single missionary for the rest of my life. Now, we both serve orphans but in different capacities: he as a lawyer for adoptions, and I directly with orphans in several orphanages. The boys' orphanage where I help is not Christian, but I have a huge open door to share my faith. We gave them all comic book-style Bibles for Christmas one year, and I bring in Bible storybooks too. We are also involved in the lives of a little boy, Marvin, and his two older sisters, Isabel and Heydi, who came out of orphanages.

We love serving in our small assembly as deacons, and Javier preaches and participates in the worship team. Our lives look nothing like we thought they would, but as I am learning, God's plans for me, and for you, are always best. They may include many times of uncertainty, but we can be convinced that He does have a plan and He is working all things for good in our lives as we seek Him. ■



Mindy Ramirez is commended from Des Moines Gospel Chapel in Des Moines, Washington. She serves with her husband, Javier, a Peruvian national.



Left (from top): Javier, an adoption lawyer, devotes his time and career to helping orphans; On a fun outing, Mindy zip lines with a girl from an orphanage in the Peruvian jungle; Mindy and Javier offer counseling to support young couples and equip them with a biblical framework for their relationships.



Right (from top): In 2019, Mindy and Javier celebrated their wedding with their family and friends; Besides having fun, Mindy supports the children she works with in practical ways, including shopping for new glasses; Javier (left) serves on the worship team at his church.



Above: Although different from Kenya, Peru has its own beauty, like the ruins of Cumbemayo.

SHOEBOXES, VBS, AND BLESSINGS

A Church in Paraguay Shares God's Love



BY ROSEMARY KONKOL

Many readers have heard about or even participated in creating shoebox gifts, or shoeboxes that people fill with toys, personal hygiene items, and school supplies and send to children in impoverished areas or locations where disasters happened. These boxes show God's love in a tangible manner and have led to children and families accepting the Lord and growing in their faith. On and off during our time serving the Lord in San Juan Bautista, Paraguay, we have been on the receiving end of these gift-filled shoeboxes, and we have witnessed what a blessing they can be—in bringing joy to children and creating gospel opportunities.

In January 2022, we had the opportunity to once again use the shoeboxes to demonstrate God's love. A few months prior, working through the Paraguayan branch of Operation Christmas Child, a ministry of Samaritan's Purse, we requested 170 gift-filled shoeboxes and attended a one-day training program. Then, we started praying about and planning how we could best be involved in the shoebox distribution.

Sharing ideas, making plans

We decided to host three events. One would be for the children who attend the Sunday school at our church. Another would be for the kids who participate in a children's activity on Saturdays at the home of church members Alberto and Teresa ("Tere"). During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, children's meetings were prohibited at the church building, but after several of the couple's nieces, nephews, and neighbors went to their house asking for the activity, Alberto and Tere began teaching Bible stories and playing games with them in their yard.

For the third event, one of the young women in the church, Ruth ("Ruthy"), proposed a bigger outreach in a neighborhood near her home—an area with low-income families, social problems, and at-risk youth. Ruthy worked with other volunteers from the local church and organized a two-week vacation Bible school (VBS), from January 15 to 30, with a daily schedule of singing, memory verses, Bible lessons, and a snack. The plan was to use the nearby elementary school, which would be closed for summer vacation. We approached the school's principal with our request, and thanks to Ruthy's and her family's good testimony in the area, we received permission.

About 20 teenagers and adults from the church volunteered to help with aspects of the VBS, including transporting chairs, providing snacks, teaching lessons, and preparing the music. Ruthy's sister, Evelyn, who studies graphic design, made the invitations. We planned to hold the evangelistic shoebox distribution on the first day of the VBS, a Saturday, so a few days before, teams passed out the invitations along with tracts and calendars. Fifty-one children, some accompanied by parents and one by a grandparent, attended the program. At the end, they received their gift-filled shoeboxes, which brought many smiles and much joy. Then, we invited them to return on the following Monday and every afternoon for two weeks.

Help abounds—from the Lord and believers

December to February are the summer months in the Southern Hemisphere, and usually, the weather is very warm. This year, Paraguay experienced an unprecedented heat wave with temperatures hotter than 104 degrees Fahrenheit and very high

humidity. We wondered if parents would allow their children to come. Originally, we had planned to ask for the use of classrooms with ceiling fans, but the school was under construction, so we could use one room, a porch, and the outside area. The Lord gave us a location in the shade and a breeze most afternoons, so it worked out better than our original plan.

Up to 60 children, along with at least six parents, attended every afternoon for the two weeks. The children were enthusiastic, and as soon as they saw our vehicles drive up, they started to come. Some of the people who had volunteered handed out water, helped the kids wash their hands, or set up chairs. Some of the shyer people did these important, behind-the-scenes jobs and felt needed and useful even though they were not up front teaching.

During the setup and cleanup times, we talked with several children and adults. We noticed that most of the adults paid attention to the lessons rather than sitting in the back talking, as often happens. Our interaction with the attentive parents led to opportunities to visit families in their homes, something that is still happening.

New contacts and personal discoveries

When the two-week series of lessons ended on Sunday, January 30, we held a graduation. Each child received a certificate, a New Testament, and a goody bag. A few children had not received a shoebox when the VBS started, but since they attended faithfully, we gave them each one at the end. Additionally, we presented the plan of salvation again using the EvangeCube resource. About 20 children said they prayed to receive the Lord as their Savior. God knows, and time will tell.

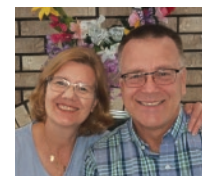
The outreach also caused growth in the church members. We finished very tired but also very energized to have had the opportunity to bless children with the shoebox gifts, show them love, and teach them the Bible. One young man, Pablo, has a pickup truck, and initially, he signed up to provide transport for chairs and supplies. Then, he sat in on a class. After listening to the first lesson, he was thrilled with the youngsters' participation, which led him to help teach. One afternoon, he exclaimed, "It turns

out that children are a lot of fun to work with!" Now, Pablo is very excited about sharing the Gospel and encouraging others. He has started a home Bible study with about five other young men using one of the Emmaus Worldwide courses.

Since the VBS, the outreach in Alberto and Tere's neighborhood has continued on a smaller scale with about 15–20 kids each Saturday afternoon. Those children excitedly received their shoebox gifts in December 2021 and, then, studied a 12-lesson course. On March 19, they had their graduation, at which 20 children got their certificates, New Testaments, and gifts. As for the Sunday school children, after they had received their shoeboxes and completed a series of Bible lessons, they graduated on Sunday, March 27, also receiving certificates and New Testaments.

Altogether, more than 150 children received gifts, heard the Gospel, and learned basic Christian principles. Through the events, Bibles and other Christian literature entered their homes. This united effort to show the love of God in San Juan Bautista, Paraguay, has resulted in new contacts, proclamation of the Gospel, and strengthening of the church. Please pray that there will continue to be positive effects. ■

Rosemary and Dale Konkol are commended from Calvary Bible Chapel in Alamosa, Colorado, and Mountain Ridge Bible Chapel in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey.



Page 6 (L–R): Two kids have fun during the VBS game time; One of the leaders, Julio, helps a boy understand the day's lesson; A boy eagerly examines the goodies in his shoebox; Children listen to a lesson.

This page (clockwise from top): By the end of the two weeks, the VBS leaders were physically tired but spiritually energized; Children and parents gather in the yard of the local elementary school; One leader, Elfi, tells the story of Jesus.



Hurricane Dorian and COVID-19

Double Devastation in the Bahamas and the Road to Recovery

BY LARRY PRICE

On September 1, 2019, Hurricane Dorian, the strongest recorded hurricane in the history of the Bahamas, devastated the Abaco Islands (a 120-mile island chain) and Grand Bahama. The Category 5 storm damaged or destroyed an estimated 90 percent of Abaco's housing and infrastructure, and 76 to 100 percent of buildings in some areas of Grand Bahama. The Caribbean country's health minister estimated that 200 people lost their lives, and about 76,000 people in Abaco and Grand Bahama became homeless.¹

Working hand in hand with CMML and private individuals, we—a group of assembly workers who are familiar with the area and had visited the disaster sites—formed a committee to assist in distributing funds to believers in affected areas. From the outset, we focused on four of Abaco's islands: Marsh Harbor (on the mainland), Man-O-War Cay, Green Turtle Cay, and Guana Cay.

In the first five months following the hurricane, residents began rebuilding despite overwhelming difficulties, making much progress. Then, around March 2020, the world changed as the COVID-19 virus began spreading worldwide. Largely due to limited medical facilities, the Bahamian government quickly initiated stringent lockdown measures, which included evacuating all visitors, volunteer workers, and organizations. For many months, and with limited exceptions, Bahamians were not allowed to leave their houses.

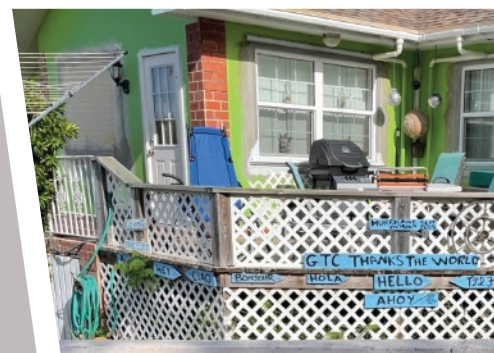
The effect was catastrophic for a country dependent on tourism as its main source of income, let alone one recovering from a natural disaster. While the pandemic raged, rebuilding efforts slowed and, in some instances, ground to a halt.

Destruction from cay to cay

In January 2020, before the pandemic erupted, I had spent several hours in Marsh Harbor while on my way to Man-O-War Cay for a week of work. The closest way to describe the city then was to compare it to a bombed-out war zone—and that was after several months of cleanup.

Then, earlier this year, I returned to the Bahamas, this time to minister the Word of God, encourage the believers, and assess the rebuilding efforts. I spent two and a half weeks visiting Marsh Harbor, Man-O-War Cay, and Green Turtle Cay. Transportation to and from each island proved challenging:

To get to Green Turtle Cay, for example, I rode in a water ferry from Man-O-War Cay to Marsh Harbor and then in a pickup truck to a believer's place of business; from there, I traveled in a loaned vehicle to Treasure Cay, then in a water ferry to Green Turtle, and finally, in a golf cart throughout Green Turtle. Now, imagine reversing the process for the return trip. Convoluted transportation like this is a normal part of island life, but for a while, it became more complicated after Hurricane Dorian's destruction.





Thankfulness and hopeful signs

While in the Bahamas, I stayed with believers whose house had suffered only minor damage. I visited believers' homes that had been completely rebuilt and spoke with about 35 people. Once again, I heard harrowing accounts of what people had endured. Many are still emotionally raw when they recount near-death experiences and the force of the storm. Yet thankfulness to God overflows.

All around, I saw signs of building and repair: new houses and the reopening of some businesses, schools, and churches. Following significant repairs, which funds from Christians around the world helped enable, Agape Christian School, connected with Marsh Harbor Gospel Chapel, resumed classes. However, it desperately needs more teachers.

In Guana Cay, believers have restarted weekly church meetings. In Green Turtle Cay, New Plymouth Gospel Chapel also resumed meetings, although its chapel building and mission house remain unfinished. Man-O-War Gospel Chapel and mission house are repaired and operational, even to the point of airing Sunday meetings via Facebook Live.

Painfully slow and expensive repairs

Still, the storm's damage and destruction remain evident. Houses and docks sit in disrepair. While some buildings have been demolished, others still need to be. Many people are rebuilding their houses only now, after more than two years. Some are also still waiting for electrical service in their homes, intermittently using portable generators, which require expensive fuel.

Some locals are waiting for repairs because the number of qualified skilled laborers, such as electricians, is limited. Others have to wait in line behind foreign second home owners, many of whom can afford to pay substantially more to have their homes worked on. Besides the long waits and limited skilled laborers, residents endure painfully slow and backlogged inspection times to obtain proper government permits.

Some people who fled the islands have chosen not to return and rebuild. Many who lost their businesses or jobs were forced to find different means of employment. Quite a few have turned to manual labor.

Still, the long-term prognosis is much brighter now than in 2020. As the COVID-19 pandemic appears to be subsiding, people are pushing to reopen the country to tourism. The government has relaxed certain protocols, and COVID-19 testing sites are easier and quicker to access. The Bahamas still needs outside volunteer help, since the limited number of able-bodied people here are focusing their energy on rebuilding houses. Materials, although expensive, are more available now.

The Lord's generous people

God's love moved believers around the world to reach out to those in need. The believers in the affected areas continue to express their deep gratitude for that help. May we continue to pray for the Bahamas and even to seek the Lord's will about how to help them. ■

Larry Price is commended from Southside Bible Chapel and Hiawassa Bible Chapel in Florida. He is active in assembly work in central Florida and other areas, including the Bahamas.

Editor's Note: To learn more about Hurricane Dorian and the early relief efforts, read the report that appeared in the December 2019 issue at CMML.us/magazine/archive.

¹ Joe Mario Pedersen, "2 Years Since Hurricane Dorian, the Bahamas Struggles to Recover Thanks to Added COVID-19," *Orlando Sentinel*, 1 September 2021, OrlandoSentinel.com.

Top (L-R): Man-O-War Gospel Chapel has been repaired and is operational (Photo by Nate Bramsen); Inside, the newly repaired Man-O-War Gospel Chapel welcomes the congregation and newcomers. **Second row (L-R):** Man-O-War Gospel Chapel suffered damage, including to its roof, windows, and siding; For more than two years, some buildings—including this government office—stood in disrepair. **Third row (L-R):** Randy Curry, an elder in the Green Turtle Cay assembly, and Ken Hardisty (MPH Day 8) prepare to work on the chapel's mission guest house, which requires complete restoration inside; The lack of skilled laborers and materials has significantly delayed the rebuilding of destroyed homes. **Bottom (left):** Decorated with signs reading "hello" in several languages, this repaired home expresses Green Turtle Cay's gratitude for relief support from around the world.

Ask a Missionary?

Missions work around the world is unique—different from what friends and family at home encounter day to day. So, to learn about life on the field while getting to know our missionaries better, we asked them to share their firsthand experience or advice.

QUESTION: Do you have a favorite Bible character who exemplifies qualities you can apply on the mission field?

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Andre Walker



My favorites are Daniel's three friends who stood firmly with the Lord despite the prospect of losing their lives.

BRAZIL

Jeanne Lipsi



Peter is an encouraging example. Although he failed at times, was impulsive, and was fearful in some situations, the Lord called him to "feed My sheep." (John 21:17) I count it a privilege and honor to serve our Lord by teaching the women in the assemblies via electronic means and also many children in the public schools about the good news.

INDIA

Shaji Matthews



My favorite is the apostle Paul. He is the best example of what the Lord Jesus Christ can do in a person's life: he was transformed from being an enemy to being an evangelist of the Gospel. He was committed to his call and loyal to the truth that he was entrusted with, and his passion and burden for the church is something we all can emulate.

CROSS-CULTURAL MINISTRIES

David Reeve



I appreciate Barnabas, the encourager. As a result of observing God's grace and worship, he was able to encourage others (Acts 11:23).

ASK YOUR QUESTIONS! Visit [CMML.us/askamissionary](https://cmml.us/askamissionary) to submit your question—it might be selected for a future issue!



Encourage a Missionary Today

EMAIL MISSIONARIES TO REMIND THEM THAT YOU ARE PRAYING FOR THEM. YOU WILL MAKE THEIR DAY VERY SPECIAL! YOU CAN FIND THEIR CONTACT INFORMATION IN YOUR COPY OF THE 2022 MISSIONARY PRAYER HANDBOOK.

Interview with Luke & Emily Rathke



New Missionaries Share about Daily Life

In July 2021, commended from Cedar Rapids Bible Chapel in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Luke and Emily Rathke moved to Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, Mexico, to begin a new life and ministry. Since then, they have been learning the language and culture while encouraging the local church and engaging with their community. They enjoy the calm way of life and their neighbors' friendliness, which enables the Rathkes to build relationships around town. Luke and Emily see the changes and challenges they have faced as adventures from the Lord, leaning on His guidance. Please pray for the Rathkes as they joyfully serve Him through evangelism, hospitality, and encouragement but also as they miss their family in the States and struggle to find time to rest.

What foods do you eat?

We eat a huge range of foods: we eat lots of meats and veggies, but we also enjoy every kind of Mexican food, which includes tacos, *mole*, *chilaquiles*, *tortas*, and *posole*, to name a few.

How do you get around?

We drive our car, but we also walk a lot; both of us usually make the 15-minute walk to the *centro* (downtown plaza) at least once per day.

What is the weather like?

It depends on if it's the rainy or dry season. It's generally pretty cold overnight and pretty warm in the day, but during the rainy season, we get a downpour once per day if not a full day of heavy rain.

What cultural behaviors do you find interesting?

Mexicans are very friendly but quiet. They are not ram-bunctious or loud. But they do enjoy a good visit. It's fun to walk the streets, which are very calm. Mexicans have a favorite word to describe their most beautiful places: *tranquilo*, meaning "peaceful." Also, they do not slam doors or car doors; they are very careful when they open and shut anything.

What is the dominant religion in your area?

Roman Catholicism is definitely dominant here.

What is a typical day for you?

A typical day would start with a relaxing morning while the Word revives us. Then, Luke goes to the plaza to meet with some men while Emily stays home to clean and organize. Luke will come home for lunch, and then, he will run errands, visit someone, or return to the plaza. Emily also goes to the plaza just before making lunch, and then, her afternoon depends on the evening's activities. We often offer hospitality for lunch or supper.

How do you relax?

We spend quiet time at home with each other working on hobby projects, or we go out to get a coffee and take a walk.

How do you get to know people?

Luke really enjoys "bench fishing" downtown: plant yourself on a bench and look busy until someone has been sitting next to you long enough for you to visit with them without it being awkward. We also love to have people over to our home or visit people we meet in their homes.

What is challenging?

We find rest to be quite challenging—it's hard to rest and initiate ministry all at the same time. We also have health challenges that complicate finding that balance.

Do you feel settled?

In many ways, yes, we feel settled here.

“ We love seeing **God work**, watching people **grow**, and experiencing adventures we **never would have imagined.**”

What is exciting?

We love seeing God work, watching people grow, and experiencing adventures we never would have imagined—whether a problem or an answer to prayer or a completely different culture.

What do you miss the most?

Oh, we definitely miss our family!

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your ministry and daily life?

Luke uses his nursing knowledge to help people who get sick. And the pandemic has impacted our visitors from the States, since travel back to the States requires a negative COVID-19 test. Yet we've not been affected by the pandemic as significantly as you might imagine. In public, the rules have relaxed. Some stores or areas are stricter, but our downtown area is more open now.

How can we pray for you?

Pray that God will continue to lead us. We are not sure how long we should be in Pátzcuaro or where to go next. We have decided to be here for another period of months and are seeing lots of doors open. Pray for daily strength, especially physically. We both need more rest than the average person due to past health issues, but we have so many goals and desires for serving here. Pray for God to bless our discipleship and evangelism efforts while we are building many relationships. Pray that God will protect those people from Satan's lies. ■



Opposite page: Luke and Emily enjoy the beauty of Lake Pátzcuaro. **Above (from top):** Daily, the Rathkes walk these streets in Pátzcuaro; The Rathkes enjoy an outing with local friends and Luke's visiting family; Luke shares the Gospel in the *centro* while holding a friend's baby; Luke tries on a *sombrero* in a nearby town known for its artisan work.