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THINKING IT THROUGH

BY DAVID DUNLAP

God Restores the Years Locusts Have Eaten

In life, it's possible to restore certain things we lost, misused, or damaged: Money can be restored. Property can be restored. Relationships can be restored. The one thing we cannot restore is time. Time flies by, and it does not return. Years pass, and we never get them back. Yet God promises the impossible: "I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten." (Joel 2:25)

The immediate meaning of this promise is clear. In the days of the prophet Joel, God's people had suffered the destruction of their entire harvest by swarms of locusts that marched like an insect army through the fields, destroying the crops and multiplying their number as they went. The harvest was wiped out, which brought God's people to their knees.

The people of Israel had done a lot of hard work in the years the locusts had suddenly eaten. After the insects had destroyed everything, the Israelites must have thought, All this work and what do we have to show for it? Yet God said that in the coming years, their fields would yield an abundance that would make up for what they had lost: "Behold, I will send to you grain and new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied by them." (Joel 2:19)

God also placed this promise in the Bible as an application for us today. What do "lost years" look like for us?

Lost years are fruitless years

Lost years are neglected investments of time and opportunities for Christ that we can never get back. It might be the loss of pouring ourselves entirely into a specific goal or venture at the expense of spiritual service to the Lord. In the end, we find little spiritual fruit to show for it.

Some believers know the regret of these years lost for the Lord's work. They think, What has come of all my time and all my effort? "A man is not old until regrets take the place of dreams," the actor John Barrymore once said. These believers may once have dreamed of great spiritual service for Christ but now regret that little has come of it.

Sadly, others had great plans for Christ but the things of this world sidetracked them entirely. They assumed that, one day, they would find the time that never came. Now, they live with an aching disappointment. Lost years are painful memories.

Restoration comes through deeper communion

Take heart! There is hope because God promises to restore your lost locust years. God can restore them by deepening your communion with Christ. The prophet Joel reminded Israel, "You shall know that I [God] am in the midst of Israel: I am the Lord your God and there is no other." (Joel 2:27) The Jewish nation had endured so much, yet afterward, they would enjoy a communion with the Lord far greater than anything they had ever known in their spiritual lives.

Christ offers bumper crops

The harvests of the people of Zion were wiped out for four years, but God restored those years—the years that the locusts had eaten—by giving bumper crops. Likewise, if you are a believer experiencing the regret of lost years, there is still time to dedicate yourself to the Lord and His work. Why not ask Him for help?

There is still time to dedicate yourself to the Lord and His work.

Tell Him, "Lord, I have spent too many years without You, too many years apart from You. Fill my heart with love and gratitude for You. Let the loss of these years make my love for You greater than it would ever have been. You have called me, as your disciple, to bear fruit that will last. Too many fruitless years have passed. Now, Lord, I ask of You, give me some years in which more lasting fruit will be born than in all my years of small harvests. Restore to me the years the locusts have eaten." God offers Himself to you, and He says what no one else can ever say: "I will restore the years the locusts have eaten." ■

David Dunlap is a commended worker based in Florida.

Vol. 52, No. 4. Christian Missions in Many Lands (ISSN 0744-4052) is published eleven times a year by Christian Missions in Many Lands, Inc., Belmar, New Jersey. Periodical postage paid at Belmar, New Jersey, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Christian Missions in Many Lands, Inc., PO Box 13, Spring Lake, NJ 07762. Gifts for missionary work and for expenses should be sent by Canadian readers to MSC Canada, 101 Amber Street, Suite 16, Markham, Ontario L3R 3B2, and by United States readers to Christian Missions in Many Lands, Inc., PO Box 13, Spring Lake, NJ 07762. All correspondence, including address changes, should be sent to Christian Missions in Many Lands, Inc., PO Box 13, Spring Lake, NJ 07762. Copyright © CMML. All rights reserved.

COVER PHOTO: Peruvian women preparing food—Wilser & Nicole Cacho-Hansen



Family Ties and Teamwork

A Church's Outreach in Cajamarca, Peru

BY WILSER & NICOLE CACHO-HANSEN



Cajamarca is a colonial city with about 135,000 people.¹ Located in a high valley (an elevation of about 9,000 feet) in the northern Andes Mountains of Peru, it is famous for being the place where the Incan Empire first met the Spanish and where the Spanish defeated and killed the last Incan emperor.² Cajamarca, where we live, is the biggest city in and capital of our department (similar to a state). Our department is home to about 1.3 million people and is one of the poorest in all of Peru.³ The people here are very open to the Gospel.

There is an interesting mix of traditional and modern in our city since many people moved here from the countryside, where the living standards, customs, and culture are distinct from those of people who grew up in the city. Our church in Cajamarca reflects this reality.

Equipping national believers

Our local church, Iglesia Cristiana Vida, located in the south of Cajamarca, began 19 years ago, in June 2003. More than 100 adults are in fellowship, and about 45 children and youth attend too. Over the years, the Lord has raised up elders, Bible study leaders, preachers, and teachers to continue the work and teams to serve practical needs, including ministries for children, youth, couples, and college students. He also formed teams, comprised of believers from our church, that spread the Gospel and plant churches in different parts of our department.

It would be impossible for us to do the work on our own, so we dedicate a lot of time to training national believers in the city and countryside. Nicole provides sound study materials

and Sunday school curricula for kids and youth, and Wilser creates material for evangelism and discipleship. Additionally, we teach others how to plan and organize. We slowly give over responsibilities until the believers can do the work on their own or on a team. We look to 2 Timothy 2:2: "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

Evangelizing family and friends

In Cajamarca, the Gospel first spread through people believing and then inviting missionaries to accompany them to other farming communities so they could share the Gospel with their friends and family. People in Cajamarca love their families! It's still the case today. Sharing the Gospel with the believers' friends, families, and neighbors is the most effective way to reach out.

Currently, our church hosts 11 Bible studies in homes around the city. They serve two purposes: to strengthen the believers in their faith and to spread the Gospel. Many people who might avoid an evangelical church are open to attending a Bible study in a friend's, neighbor's, or family member's home.

We develop friendships with new people at the Bible studies, and then, we share the Gospel with them. If new people

Sharing the Gospel with the believers' friends, families, and neighbors is the most effective way to reach out.

Left: (Top) Iglesia Cristiana Vida hosts a service celebrating its 19th anniversary. **(Bottom)** A group of believers participates in a missions training program. **Middle:** A couple studies one of the discipleship courses. **Right:** In the countryside, women wearing traditional dress socialize while preparing food.

show interest, we invite them to a one-to-one evangelistic study or a small group, sharing the Gospel at every opportunity. If they place their faith in the Lord, someone will study the basics of the Christian faith with them and help prepare them for baptism.

Wilser has dedicated a lot of time to writing two discipleship courses for use with seekers in the city, and he is finishing one for believers to use in the countryside. Pray that the church in Cajamarca will grow further in number and maturity with the Lord's help and that God will continue to use Iglesia Cristiana Vida to reach the lost—in the capital city and around the department.

Spreading the Gospel through teamwork

Currently, our church's outreach teams share the Gospel, plant churches, and train others in five mission points within the department. These places were chosen because someone wanted to share the Gospel with family, friends, or neighbors in a particular community. Please pray for these communities and the teams, which visit most weeks. Pray that the Lord will raise up local leaders to do the work and firmly establish churches. Each community has unique needs that you can pray for:

Chilete

Chilete is located two hours south of our city, in the Jequetepeque Valley, which extends all the way to the coast. About 2,000 people reside in this town, and a lot of travelers pass through on their way to other small towns.⁴ Here, the transportation and farming industries produce much work.

Chilete has an established church, which struggled for years until a believer named Zeila began working at the

local hospital and ministering to kids and youth. She is key to reaching out to others. A team from Cajamarca visits about every 15 days to provide support. Her husband and oldest daughter came to faith in Jesus in Chilete, and both were baptized in December 2022. Pray for Zeila and her family. Pray, too, that the Lord will raise up leadership made of local believers.



Río Seco

Located an hour and a half east of our city, this small farming community (known as a *caserío*) has about 185 homes and 585 people.⁵ After four years of our teams visiting Río Seco, we paused the ministry for a time, due, in part, to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet the Lord continued to work, and now, seven baptized believers are being disciplined every week in a borrowed



building. The owner has decided to sell the building, so our church is raising the money needed to buy it. We praise the Lord for He has provided about half of the cost through freewill offerings; please pray He will supply the rest. The visiting teams reach out to children, youth, and adults every week. Pray that the church in Río Seco will grow in number and maturity.

La Paccha



This community is on the outskirts of our city, and a team works with the kids and youth. Join us in asking the Lord to strengthen the work in this neighborhood and to open the doors to planting a church.

Jesús



This district of about 14,700 people lies 40 minutes south of our city and is made up of many distinct communities, most dedicated to farming.⁶ The team there works with kids and adolescents in

Left (from top): In Chilete, Wilser (right) helps baptize a growing believer, Jon; A ministry encourages couples through Bible teaching and activities. **Right (from top):** People in Río Seco enjoy a Christmas meeting; The team that visits Río Seco also hosts children's activities; Kids receive bright yellow balloons during an activity in La Paccha; In Jesús, children participate in special activities that teach them about Christ.

the capital of this district—also called Jesús. So far, the adults haven't been receptive to the Gospel. Pray for the kids who seek the Lord weekly. Pray that their parents might be open to hearing the Gospel as well.

San Pablo

In the 1960s, the Gospel was first preached in this district of about 13,600 people in the mountainous countryside northwest of our city.⁷ Over time, believers, national workers, and missionaries from the coast and from Cajamarca formed many churches and trained people. Since 2007, believers from San Pablo have been planning the Bible trainings and activities each year, and they seek Wilser's help with finding teachers, study materials, and financial support for different activities. Wilser also trains more teachers from this area.

To date, there are 24 churches in San Pablo, but some struggle more than others. One problem is that some of the churches embrace false doctrine (mostly the prosperity gospel), which leads to false teaching and practices. We have strong ties and fellowship with 16 of the churches—most are located in small farming communities, where the believers tend to be farmers. We pray the Lord will use these 16 churches to strengthen the other churches and that He will raise up workers from the area who can dedicate their time to that goal.



Praying for future growth

We are making plans, with the blessing of the elders at our church, to multiply the work in the city of Cajamarca. Seven years ago, our family began praying about this possibility, and now, the Lord is leading us to plant a church on the east side of the city, in a part of town that is growing. We have the vision to start churches of about 80 people where they can fellowship and live their faith in a family environment with a lot of opportunities to serve.

We hope to start with about five families from our current church and contact the community through personal evangelism, outreach, and a home Bible study. A Venezuelan family



that we reached out to during the pandemic and is now seeking the Lord hopes to join us too.

Please pray that the Lord will give us wisdom and that He will touch the hearts of the people He puts in our path. We will continue to work with Iglesia Cristiana Vida at the five mission points throughout the region. Please pray for our current church and our family as we transition and for unity as we share the Gospel, plant churches, and train leaders in Cajamarca. ■



Wilser and Nicole Cacho-Hansen are commended from Clinton Street Bible Chapel in Gresham, Oregon.

¹ "Population of Cities in Peru 2023," *World Population Review*, WorldPopulationReview.com.

² "Cajamarca, Peru," *Anywhere Peru*, Anywhere.com. ³ Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, "Censos 2017: Departamento de Cajamarca Cuenta con 1,341,012 Habitantes," *Estado Peruano*, 7 November 2018, Gob.pe. ⁴ Thomas Brinkhoff, "Chilete in Contumazá (Cajamarca Region)," *City Population*, 22 October 2017, CityPopulation.de. ⁵ "Mapa Satelital de Río Seco, Distrito de Gregorio Pita, Provincia de San Marcos, Departamento de Cajamarca en Perú," *Via Satelital*, 7 February 2023, ViaSatelital.com. ⁶ "El Distrito de Jesús," *Advercity*, 2023, Distrito.pe. ⁷ "El Distrito de San Pablo," *Advercity*, 2023, Distrito.pe.

Please also pray for . . .

Peace in Peru—a country facing a time of political instability. The south has experienced much violence.