

Missions trips to Haiti are always filled with adventure and excitement! I know folks are always interested in seeing pictures and hearing stories, so in case you didn't get to hear the stories I shared at church Sunday, I thought it would be fun to send out a little snap shot of the trip.

The work on these Haiti trips starts before we even leave; packing large suitcases with donations to bring with us. There were 11 of us on the team this trip, and each of us brought 2 full 50lb suitcases, one carryon, and one personal item to maximize the amount of stuff we could bring. Food, clothes, medicine, school supplies, toys...as many useful things as we can, we bring with us.



Our base of operation in Haiti is an orphanage in a small village called Fond Douze. The team has been going back to the same area for over 20 years, and have made strong connections with the people in the area and seen a lot of great transformation. The orphanage itself is a really great structure (by Haitian



standards): we usually have running water and we'll even have electricity sometimes. The compound has a gate at the bottom of the hill, which gives us a safe location to work out of. Once we get settled in, we sort through all the donations, assess the needs in the area, and start planning out our first couple of days. Normally we'd start off the first few evenings with some church services and preaching, but with so much poverty and starvation in the area due to the economic crisis, we instead focused on just feeding people for the first few days. We got big 55lb bags of rice, bags of beans, and bottles of

vegetable oil, and just went throughout the village to families we knew were in need and made sure they had some food to eat for the next few weeks. Some people couldn't even wait for us to come out to them, and we actually called them in to the orphanage to meet us there and pick up the food. While

Haiti has been completely unaffected by COVID-19, they still do not have a stable government in place from their previous elections, and I'd estimate that the majority of the population is currently unemployed. There are pretty destructive riots on a fairly regular basis, and it's become dangerous enough that almost all foreign missionaries and workers have been evacuated from the country. Even the local population is afraid to travel to



nearby cities a lot of the time, which makes it difficult to get people medical help when they need it. One of the moms in the area was very sick when we arrived; completely bedridden with a mysterious illness causing painful rashes all over, plus a serious leg injury from a motorcycle accident that left major burns on her leg. She was too scared to go to the hospital in the capitol, but we were able to get her to a hospital in a safer area that was ultimately able to diagnose her and treat her.

After a few days of bringing food to families in the area, we were able to start putting together some services. Bryan and I were the main preachers this trip, with Bryan preaching a lot on being filled and led by the Holy Spirit, while I focused on lessons we could learn from the persecutions the early Christians were facing in the book of Acts. Here Bryan and I are by the church that's located next to our



orphanage, joining them for their Sunday morning service. It was a really encouraging time, not just with us sharing some messages but also listening to the testimonies of the various members of the church. One man stood up and shared with everyone how he had recently recovered from an illness that seemed to be getting worse and worse. Medications weren't helping, his body was getting weaker, and he was losing the ability to do anything. He and his wife were very committed to prayer, however, and over the past two weeks he had recovered enough that he was able to attend church. He

had a very powerful challenge to all of us: "Don't just show up and play church. Take it seriously."

For Sunday evening, we decided to hold an outdoor service right by the orphanage building to maximize the number of people that could attend. We had a little over 100 adults outside, while half the team set up some children's ministry stuff inside for a little over 100 kids. At the end of the night, we got some plates of rice/bean/chicken dinners and fed everyone; maybe around 230 people total. When we ran out of plates of food, we just gave people some extra money so they could buy their own food later. While I knew I was preaching to a mostly Christian audience, with the sermon focused mostly on Acts 4, I found out later that we had at least some people approach members of our team after wanting to pray to accept Christ. One of the newcomers during that service, a young man named



Candee, apparently had been getting involved in some...less than good...activities, and just happened to be around when our team was out delivering food to families earlier. After some of our team members shared the gospel with him during that visit, he just started crying, and we saw him show up at every service and session we put on for the rest of the trip, and it looked like he was bringing other people with him too.

The nights were mostly peaceful in the area. Easter trips to Haiti come with the added difficulty of overlapping

with a celebration called RaRa. RaRa is essentially an anti-Easter celebration, and consists mostly of drunken crowds carousing through the streets mocking the fact that Jesus was killed. We would often hear them at night in the distance, usually around 1 or 2 am, playing loud music and generally causing a disturbance in the area. They can be dangerous if you get caught in them, but fortunately they seemed to only happen at night this time around and we were able to avoid the mobs. Interestingly, one of the guys who had been down at the RaRa came up to our team later, telling us that the next time we come he wanted to talk to us about giving his life to Jesus...which was pretty surprising. It's a reminder to us that even when it seems like someone is engaged in destructive, irresponsible behavior, God can still be working in their hearts to show them the error of their ways.

One of the special events we put on this trip was visiting a school run by a full-time missionary that has continued to live in Haiti despite the danger. The school she runs operates in the city of Leogane, which is apparently the center of the RaRa celebrations. It creates a very dangerous environment for the kids, and Elaine herself has had to move several times to stay safe, but God has been good in protecting all the kids at their school. We put together a session for them, with everyone on the team sharing some thoughts and testimonies with the kids.



I challenged the kids with the story of King Josiah, and reminded them that they should never think they are too young to do important things for God. It was encouraging to see how many kids were dedicated to pursuing a productive life, being surrounded by a culture looks down on anyone who tries to build a successful life. With so much lawlessness and criminal activity in the area, Elaine told us (almost in tears) that it felt like "Everything is permissible, except getting ahead in life." Despite that opposition, many of the kids told me they were interested in pursuing important careers like nursing and engineering, and you could see the dedication in them as I shared about my job teaching at a university.



We also made sure to set aside some time to pray for each member of the school staff. They each had such amazing hearts for serving and teaching, and had pushed through many obstacles to continue keeping the school running during such a dangerous time. We were also able to help them out financially, giving Elaine \$2000 to spend on whatever they needed to keep the school going. Operating as a tuition-free private school, they support

themselves entirely with donations, but each year God has continued to provide them with just enough to carry through to the next year. And of course in our area, we continue to support the education of

dozens of kids, not only through high school but even all the way up to a college education. We know we can't change the direction of an entire nation overnight, but the more we invest in the next generation, the greater chances we give to create a future where entire communities aren't trapped in perpetual poverty and starvation.

We invest in a lot of local businesses as well, as people try to put their lives together enough to be able to support themselves. One tragic story turned triumph was a father who lost his business after several people in his family became sick. He was running a business making charcoal, but ended up having to sell everything to cover the medical costs. Our team found him on a previous trip stuck doing low-paying day labor, earning \$3 a day. For \$440, we were able to help him get his business up again, and by the time we came on this trip he was back on his feet and able to provide for the family again. He was so grateful to our team that he offered us one of his three goats as a token of gratitude. We told him that wasn't necessary, we were happy to help.

Of course, I never pass up the opportunity to put together some fun science projects with the kids in my free time at the orphanage. This time around, we built a tiny solar powered car, a battery powered robot that would stumble around the table, and this interesting clock design that was apparently invented by Leonardo da Vinci. The boy with me here, Macken, really loves building things, and every trip is always coming up to me eager for some science gadgets to play with.



We also put together a large youth service for everyone in the area. After singing some songs and (and having an amusing little rap battle), we split up into a boys group and a girls group, and everyone on the team shared some challenges and testimonies. With the boys, I covered the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, and challenged them to take their future commitments as husbands and fathers seriously. Many of them had grown up in broken families, abandoned by their fathers, and I encouraged



each of them to be the ones to break that perpetual cycle and honor the commitment of marriage. One of the guys listening who had gotten his girlfriend pregnant some time ago came up to me after and thanked me for the message, and I know he is committed to being a father that will be there for his new family. We can't prevent every bad decision from happening, but bit by bit we can challenge everyone to make better choices going forward. Then after the session, we got everyone back together and handed out sack lunches for everyone, which included a sandwich, chips, and two cookies.

And of course, it wouldn't be an Easter trip without a giant Easter egg hunt for all the kids. The Friday before we left, we got all the kids in the area together for an Easter lesson, followed by an egg hunt

outside with candy and toys for everyone. We can't actually bring enough plastic eggs for everyone, so instead most of our eggs are just paper cutouts with candy taped to the back.



After that came the really dangerous part of the trip. We had to get back into the capitol early, since we all needed a COVID test before we could get back into the US, and we decided that the best strategy to be ready for our flights on Tuesday was to head into the capitol Saturday to avoid traveling on Easter Sunday. That would allow us to get the tests on Monday without having to worry about getting stopped by an unexpected mob or riot. There was a real risk; driving out from the capitol when we first arrived, we just barely missed a major gang shootout that kicked up shortly after we left that part of the city, and now we were driving back. This time, we have the added difficulty of trying to find a safe place to stay in the capitol, preferably close to the airport so there's less chance of a riot blocking our way on Tuesday. We found a spot that was close, affordable, and supposedly safe, so we set out.

The situation got pretty intense as one of our trucks broke down at an extremely dangerous part of the city...right around where the violence had been previously. We tried to bring in another driver to take us the rest of the way, but no one we were able to contact was willing to; apparently just ahead there was some gang activity and the whole area was on edge. It ended up being pretty providential, because if the truck hadn't broken down, we might have driven right into it, and that could have gotten dangerous pretty fast.

Fortunately, the gang activity died down, we were able to find a new truck, and we were able to get in touch with some nearby friends who could take care of the truck that had broken down, so we pressed forward. We almost chose to stay at a closer hotel with more security, but we decided it would be better to honor our initial commitment to the first place we had reserved and try to stay there. And that turned out to be a huge blessing, because God wasn't done with our trip quite yet.

We got to the place safely, and it was really nice. We settled in, and Sunday we had our own Easter service; 11 of us from the US plus 7 of our young leaders in Haiti that we wanted to spend some extra time with, teaching and



training. By the time the evening rolled around, we were sitting out by the pool, each sharing some things God had been teaching us, and encouraging each other. As we were talking, I noticed the owner of the place was also out by the pool, watching us and listening to us. After we finished our session, he came up to our team leader in tears, saying that in all his years running this place he had never seen a group like ours. He could feel the presence of God in our group, and wanted to become a Christian. After praying, they exchanged contact numbers so they could stay in touch, and he told our team that from now on his place was our place; any time we were staying the capital we could use his facility. That might not seem like much, but having a safe place in the capitol that we can always count on to stay at will come in very handy in future trips, and was definitely something God set up for us.

There are so many more stories I could tell from this trip; people who accepted Christ, families we helped out of difficult situations, lives that were saved from the support we gave, but I guess I'll have to save those stories for another time. Each trip we go down with tens of thousands of dollars, and even though the work is never done we know that God continues to multiply the little loaves and fish we bring to carry out his purposes (and yes, we are very often praying that God will multiply the food as we're passing it out...and somehow we always get it to work out). And ultimately we're committed to seeing the kingdom of heaven grow in this tiny jungle village. We're committed to our friends, to our brothers and sisters in Christ, and God isn't done with His work yet. There will be difficult days ahead, and we've had some pretty painful losses, but we never forget our theme song for every trip we go on:

"Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know he holds the future, and life is worth the living just because He lives."

Really appreciate you guys, and know that I'm always here if you ever need anything!

In Christ,

Matt

Meet the team:



Here's Winston, our team leader, giving a talk at Elaine's school. Winston is originally from Vietnam; he was 7 years old the day he had to flee Saigon during the Vietnam war as the North successfully took the city. Coming to the US as a refugee, he has a huge heart for those in need, and a great passion for seeing the gospel change lives. He continues to work as a full-time pastor and missionary, traveling all over the world to advance the gospel.

Translating for us next to him is Daniel, a young man in Fond Douze who has really been stepping up as a leader in the area. He's been a consistent presence

over the years, ever since he was a little kid, and has really made it his mission to be a light in the world around him. Our team wouldn't be able to accomplish even half of what we do without his incredible maturity, compassion, and wisdom. He maintains relationship with Christian groups all throughout the region, and is able to connect us quickly to any needs around us.



Our team's "second in command" is Mitch. He's also a full time missionary along with his wife, and brings a great deal of wisdom and experience on every trip. He has a great sense of humor, and is also a great baker. While we were getting ready for our big youth service event, Mitch was handling all our cookie baking needs, supplying us with over 200 cookies to give out as snacks after the service. A physics teacher by background, Mitch has decided to make the ministry his full time calling, and works to bring the gospel wherever the team ends up going.

Leading us in worship on the guitar here is Elisha. She first connected with us as an undergraduate at UCLA, and has made it her mission in life to fight for humanitarian causes. Losing her father at the age of 7, she grew up alone here in California while her mother continued to work in China. Overcoming the many struggles that come with growing up without having your parents as an active part of your life, she has an incredible heart for the orphan and the poor. She currently runs an international organization that both provides economic opportunities to lift people out of poverty, as well as fund schools and education. Dozens of families in our area are able to send their kids to school because of the work she does.



Dave and Sara (married just 3 months ago) are regular leaders on all of the team's activities. Sara is one of the most experienced members on the team when it comes to Haiti, and everyone in the area of Fond Douze knows her. She is always keeping track of the needs and situations in the area, and is able to direct the rest of us to the individuals who need help. Dave, meanwhile, with his US military experience, brings the necessary muscle to the team whenever we're in a tight spot. He also has an incredible heart for prayer, and regularly meets with Christian churches he's connected to

around the world (especially in the middle east) over zoom to pray with them and encourage them. He's part of the reason the team is soon planning to expand their international missions efforts to include helping refugees in the middle east.



Dave's brother, Bryan, is one of the main preachers on any trip we go on. He has an incredible business and marketing background (I think he's currently running something like 5 different businesses), and in addition to his preaching he also helps mentor people on developing their own businesses so they can support themselves. He has huge heart for seeing people lifted out of poverty, and many families in the area are grateful for his support in helping them get to the point of financial stability.



Brian was the coleader for my Bible study group down at UCLA and one of my closest friends over the years. Although he runs his own business full time, he's been a constant presence on the team for many years, and brings his business and computer experience to help equip people for success in our area. He's experienced many tragedies in life, losing his younger brother to a motorcycle accident, followed by both parents to cancer, all within the span of a few years. This has only served to increase his passion for the gospel, however, and he makes incredible sacrifices to join the team for many of the trips we go on. When I first got to Oklahoma, he was there to greet me at the airport dressed up in a three piece suit like a chauffeur just for laughs.



Angela is our team medic on every trip. A medical lab tech by background, she's made the missions field her full time calling, and helps keep everyone in our area patched up whenever something goes wrong. You'll often see her sitting outside with her med kit as the kids line up with various cuts and scrapes and other problems. She's also instrumental in keeping our "healthy pregnancy" initiative going in the area; providing basic medical care and nutrition for pregnant and nursing moms every Tuesday. She also organizes a lot of our children's ministry activities when we're there, and makes sure none of the kids are getting left out.



Ku'uipo is one of the interns on the team, currently going through her seminary training. She connected with us as an undergraduate at UCLA, coming from a broken family background with an absent mother. Her hardships growing up have strongly motivated her to live life to the fullest, so we won't have any regrets over wasted moments. She's a constant presence on the trips, and also works closely with Elisha in running the "Haiti in the hands of Haitians" organization. With her here is SunSun, a young boy in our area with Down Syndrome. It's hard enough to have

Down Syndrome here in the US, so you can imagine how difficult it is in Haiti with other kids teasing you while adults think you are somehow cursed by God. Our team is constantly setting a loving example for everyone, however, and over the years I've noticed it having an effect on the way the kids treat him and each other. By being role models that demonstrate love and compassion to the next generation, our hope is that we'll raise up young people who have the right mindset when helping those with disabilities.



The other intern with our team is Yancy. Yancy first connected with our team as a high schooler, and has continued to stay involved with our trips throughout college and after. He leads most of the sports ministry activities, connecting with young men in the area through things like basketball and soccer. He made a big point on this trip of sharing his own struggles with the people we were ministering too, including his depression and suicide attempt when he was a teenager. Like Ku'uipo, Yancy is going through his seminary training with the goal of going into full time ministry, and joins the team in their work all around the world.



The young man translating for us here, John Mark, has really been stepping up as a leader over the years. When he was a kid, I used to give him my camera so he could run off and take pictures of the kids going crazy.



Daniel and John Mark on my very first Haiti trip back in 2008, whenever I gave them my camera to play with. They're a lot older now, but still just as crazy!



These dresses are probably a little too small for Exzam, but hopefully they'll be just the right size for his little daughter. Exzam has long been a translator for our team, and has translated for many of the sermons I've preached.



Helping Angela keep the kids under control here is SunSun, one of our most faithful leaders in the area. He's always the first one to meet us at the airport when we arrive in Haiti, to make sure we're able to navigate the chaos safely.



This is Fabienne, and apparently everyone has decided that she's somehow my daughter. Not entirely sure how I got a kid, but it's been amazing watching her grow up over the years into a faithful leader. She just turned 19, and was baptized just as we were leaving to head back to the US. She was a constant presence throughout the trip, helping the team with everything we needed. Her English is getting really good, too.