

## **Mission Journal #1 - Belize (Friday through Sunday)**

*But Jesus called to them saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them. For to such belongs the kingdom of God." - Luke 18:16*

Greetings from Punta Gorda, Belize! Our team of twenty-two, composed of dentists, children's ministry workers, families, teens, and adults from VBC and a Southern California partner church, arrived in this seaside village on Friday (11/16). We've been visiting this area every year since around 2006, but began serving in other areas of Belize around 2001. Over the years, we've been able to develop some wonderful relationships with church families, pastors, schools, teachers, community leaders, local children, and their families. We've shared the gospel with hundreds and hundreds of Belizians and have been able to lead many to trust in Jesus and be baptized. Many of the children we've watched grow up over the years are now adults - some with babies of their own. But after all these years, they continue to respond to us, meet with us, and trust us as we faithfully share the gospel and model the truth and love of the Savior.

Some of the children actually met us at the airfield where some of the team landed, and have constantly been with us ever since. Others have joined us along the way as they got word that we are back in town and many of them have brought new friends for us to meet and minister to. We've been able to hug them, laugh with them, swim with them, feed them, pray with them, and share how God has been at work in our lives with them.

The dental clinic has already been opened two days - Saturday and half of Sunday - and seen patients from the moment their doors opened until it was dark outside. Each patient receives lots of personal attention and compassionate care, in addition to a gospel bracelet (a rubber bracelet with a heart symbol - God Loves, a division sign - Sin Separates, a cross - Jesus Saves, and a questions mark - You Decide), and individual prayer. The dentists pour in many hours of intense work but they always join the rest of the group at night with exhausted bodies but uplifted spirits because of the interactions they've had with their Belizian patients. Pray for these members of our team - that God will provide them with energy, wisdom, and insight about how to care for both the dental and spiritual needs of their patients.

Yesterday was a highlight for us. We pray for these kids to flourish spiritually - and in every other way in their lives - but often we don't see how God is answering our prayers. One of our specific prayers has been for the kids we've been investing in to be invested in by a local church community. Yesterday, we visited a church that has done that. Each Sunday, they send a bus to pick up local children and transport them to their church facility for worship services. In addition, two of the boys we've known for years are now being developed as leaders and given responsibilities as ushers in the church. We attended the church service to see for ourselves yesterday and it was so encouraging to see hundreds of Belizians gathered together to worship - and to see so many of the kids we know and love attending the service and serving there! We still need to investigate more about the church, what they believe, and how they're caring for the kids, so pray for us as we do our research.

Today is a national holiday here in Belize (Garifuna Day) so everything is shut down. We'll spend the day visiting some of the local islands and snorkeling, but tomorrow, half the team will open up the dental clinic and the other half will visit our first school to share a message about making wise choices in life, and ultimately choosing Jesus. Pray for God to anoint our message and save many souls, both in the dental clinic and the schools!

With grateful hearts for each of you, and a united love for Christ,  
Tim and the Belize Team

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## **Mission Journal #2 - Belize (Monday)**

Greetings everyone!

Today is a national holiday in Belize so the country is almost completely shut down. It's Garifuna Day, paying tribute to the arrival of the Garifuna people in Belize. The Garifuna are of African descent and arrived on Caribbean islands primarily through the notorious slave-trading industry. Several centuries ago, some of the Garifuna were given their freedom from a nearby Caribbean nation and set sail for Belize (at the time it was known as British Honduras). Initially, they were denied permission to come ashore, but eventually, their persistence paid off and they were granted admittance to make Belize their new home. Many settled in Punta Gorda, where we stay each year, and where the Garifuna first came ashore, and so this has become the epicenter of the national holiday.

Because it's a national holiday, the schools are closed and so is the dental clinic, so the team took a day off to visit some of the uninhabited local islands, swim, snorkel, and fish (we caught about a dozen snapper, bonefish, and other local fish we'd never even hear of!). It was a wonderful day for the team to bond and connect, but the highlight of the day arrived before we even ate breakfast.

As we were preparing to eat, one of the Belzian ladies who works at the hotel we're staying at approached Kristi and asked her if we enjoyed the church service we attended yesterday. Her name is AnnMarie and she's been one of the kindest and most godly women we've encountered at the hotel over the years, and we saw her at the church worship service yesterday. Kristi told her that we'd heard about the church through some of the Facebook posts we'd seen by some of the children we minister to in PG (Punta Gorda) and so we wanted to visit it and see what it was all about. AnnMarie then said she'd seen us with a lot of the kids in town and that a boy who currently lives with her knows us and talks about us. We asked her who he was and she said his name is Mikey. She told us that Mikey's dad had died a few months earlier and how the Lord led her to take him in.

About that time, I quickly began to realize what an amazing moment this was. I immediately began to think about the conversation that I'd had with Mikey's mom, Sharon, the day before, and how she'd mentioned that Mikey was staying with a 'church lady' and how I'd wondered who she was and what kind of influence she might be having on Mikey. Then I thought about how we've been praying - literally for years - for these kids to get connected with a local church, or local leaders who would invest in them, care for them and disciple them. But we never thought or even prayed that a local family, or someone like AnnMarie, would take one of these kids into their home! And AnnMarie is also the director of the youth ministry, and she oversees the ushers (Mikey was serving as an usher the morning we attended the church service)! We told AnnMarie that she was not only an answer to prayer, but she was a major piece in a puzzle that we've been trying to understand and figure out for years!

Paul's words to the church in Ephesus came to mind: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think..." Join us in praising God for his exceedingly wonderful provision! We can't wait to hear more from AnnMarie and praise God together with her for his faithfulness!

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## **Mission Journal #3 - Belize (Tuesday)**

Today was another full day of ministry. After breakfast and a time of worship in the word and through prayer, we divided into two teams. The dental team headed to the village of Forest Home, where they

served all day at the dental clinic there. They've seen many patients so far - some who have been in pain for years, some who needed root canals, and others who had to have multiple teeth pulled. It was an exhausting, sometimes emotional day for the dental team, but they encountered every patient with compassion to meet both their dental and spiritual needs. Every patient hears the gospel and receives prayer and many leave the clinic with a new understanding of the gift of salvation through Christ, either as new believers or with a new understanding of God's gift of grace through Jesus.

The other team went to TCC (Toledo Community College) which is basically the local high school to share a message about making healthy choices (specifically in regard to drugs, alcohol, self-harm, and sexual activity). When we arrived on campus, we immediately visited the principals' office and then the vice-principal's office to check-in and neither had any record of our appointment to speak in classrooms today. But within minutes, they made accommodations for us and we ended up speaking in six classrooms to over 100 students! Can you imagine showing up on a campus in the States and being given permission to go into classrooms and share without the administration doing a thorough background check and making us wait days, weeks, or even months to actually get into the classes?!

The students seemed very receptive to our message, and at the conclusion of each class, we were able to share a gospel message in each class and then pray over them. The last point in our presentation is the importance to 'think beyond the moment' when it comes to making choices in life. We use that point to transition into our gospel presentation and explain that we weren't just created for a moment - we were created for eternity. But how we will spend eternity depends on the choice we make about Jesus. At that point, we pass out the rubber gospel bracelets we had made and walk them through the steps to salvation. It was so moving for us to see the students all over campus wearing the bracelets during the day. Though we didn't have the chance to spend much individual time with students after our presentation, we know there are many teachers and administrators on campus who are believers, so we pray they will be able to follow up and nurture the seeds that were planted today.

In the afternoon, we invited the kids we know to join us for an afternoon swim in the sea in front of our hotel and over a dozen of them showed up! It's an amazing site to see all these kids, climbing all over us in the water, laughing, playing, and enjoying the friendships we've cultivated with some of them for many years. But there were also new kids who came, too! Every year, we keep adding to the number of kids we meet here as our core kids bring their friends and family to meet us. And those new kids also come to our worship gatherings in the evenings, to hear our testimonies, sing, and pray with us. Again, the seeds of the gospel are being planted in many young lives here this week.

After our swim, we got cleaned up and drove to the dental clinic to join the team for dinner (our cook and friend, Maylin, once again made an unforgettable meal - we haven't eaten the same thing twice since we arrived last Friday!). After dinner, we went to a local radio station and were interviewed about why we're here for the week. I explained why we continue to travel to Belize and serve here, and how we always leave Belize feeling even more encouraged by the people we came to serve! Then Shawna Fuller, Jill Daniels, and Julie Frey all shared their testimonies on the air and expressed the grace of God in their lives in a beautiful, profound way.

We all drove back to PG and had our evening devotion time on the dock in front of our hotel. After the devotional team shared their message, they asked if any of the PG kids who had joined us wanted to share their testimonies - and two of the kids did! One of them, Keith (we call him Keithy) has been through a lot in his life. He was a street kid for years and said he used to run around the streets of PG, like a chicken with its head cut off, looking for trouble, and more often than not, finding it. But then he shared that through everything (this kid was the victim of horrific abuse, neglect, jail, and more than we'll probably ever know), he has come to a trust in God. That is so moving for all of us who know him.

Please pray for Keithy, Mikey, Kadir, and Clayton in particular, as they move into adulthood and determine their identities in Christ and who Jesus will be to them. Thank you for your faithful support - we are sensing the power of your prayer coverage in tangible ways during our time here.

We all love you and thank God for the bond we share in Christ,

Tim & the Belize Team

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## **Mission Journal #4 - Belize (Wednesday)**

God is good and Jesus REIGNS!

What a wonderful day it's been for us in Punta Gorda, Belize. It started out when Keithy, one of the boys we've been friends with for many years (he's now 18), asked me to call him at 5:45 am to wake him up and then pick him up for his first day of work. It sounds like such a small favor, but it was huge in that we'd never seen him work before, and he was so focused on making sure he got up in time and got to his new job punctually. It's been raining more than we ever remember this week in Belize and between that and his nervousness about blowing his chance to make a great first impression, Keithy did everything he could to make the most of this opportunity. And he did! We are all so proud of him! Pray he will continue to be responsible and consistent in taking care of himself, and trusting Jesus.

After an encouraging time of worship and prep with the team after breakfast, we divided up and the dental team went to the clinic and the children's ministry team went to a different high school - Julain Cho - about thirty minutes outside of PG. We were able to speak with five classes and share the gospel with each of them. Please pray the Lord will nurture the seeds that were planted and these young people will trust in Jesus.

On the way back to our hotel from the school, we stopped by a hotel we've enjoyed visiting over the years called Belcampo (the name recently changed to The Copal Tree Lodge). It's a beautiful property, tucked away in the jungle, and it's always a treat to visit and take new team members to experience it. We've visited there so often, we've made friends with the staff (Mark, Duckie, and Gideon's cousin, Elon) and they took great care of us. We were given samples of the chocolate they manufacture onsite and delicious espresso drinks made from the coffee they produce, as well. We even got to listen to the local howler monkeys howling in the distance (it literally sounds like we're listening to the sounds of Jurassic Park!). We took a quick tour of the chocolate factory on the property with Elon and prayed over him and his family before heading back to our hotel in PG.

Unfortunately, because it was so stormy, we weren't able to meet with the PG kids after school, so we took the time to prepare for our presentation tomorrow at the primary school in San Jose, a remote village near the Guatemala border. We'll be speaking with younger children about dental hygiene and nutrition, and then sharing the gospel with them, as well.

In the evening, we were invited to speak at a local church in PG. Two of our team members, Annika and Kainoa, shared their testimonies and I shared from Matthew 7:13-14 about the wide and narrow paths which Jesus identified and explained. I invited others to share about how God is at work in their lives, and the pastor stood up and shared that his daughter had been tragically killed in Belize City a couple of months earlier, and though he and his wife are grieving horribly, they have remained steadfast in trusting the Lord to sustain them and strengthen them in their deep sorrow and sadness. We immediately prayed for him and wept with him as he and his wife are clearly devastated by this tragedy. But at the same time, we were all inspired by the resolve he and his wife have in resting in the comfort and reassurance of the Savior in the midst of their grief. His daughter had three children which the pastor and his wife are now raising and they asked for us to pray for the children as they adjust to their new lives in PG and deal with the loss of their mom. It was a sweet time of worship and fellowship with this church. We gave them a financial gift we'd collected and they were overjoyed with gratitude for our generosity and compassion.

We drove back to the hotel, and were met by a slew of Belizian kids for our evening devotion time. Dan, Cassandra, and Suemin shared their testimonies and we were all so touched by their sincerity and vulnerability. Suemin's story was especially moving. She's not yet a believer, primarily because of the way in the past she'd been treated by the church and people who called themselves Christians. But she tearfully acknowledged that the way she's been welcomed and accepted and loved by this team has been quite significant for her. Pray that God will allow the truth and power of the gospel to continue to be on clear display in our lives as we not only minister to the people of Belize, but also to our team members like Suemin who need God's grace through Christ for salvation.

Thanks again for the love and prayer support we constantly sense coming from you all. We are so thankful for for each of you.

Tim & the Belize Team

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#### **Mission Journal #4 - Belize (Thursday)**

Thanksgiving greetings everyone! We hope you each enjoyed a meaningful celebration of the day with family and friends. Here in Belize, we woke up to yet another stormy day, and our last full day of ministry. After breakfast and a time of worship together, the dental team headed to the dental clinic, and the rest of us drove to a remote Mayan village called San Jose, about an hour's drive from Punta Gorda.

The drive to San Jose was through the heart of the Belizian jungle, on rugged dirt roads, scattered with endless potholes filled with water from all the recent rains. We actually weren't sure we'd be able to make it to the village because of all the rain, but it ended up not being nearly as bad as we thought it would be.

When we finally arrived in San Jose, we were greeted by the principal, Madonio Cal, who was so excited to see us. He's been serving there for about seven years and when we walked into his office, we observed a room filled with crosses, Bibles, and posters depicting the life of Jesus. He explained that the school is supported by the Catholic Church, even though he isn't Catholic himself. When I told him I was a pastor and we were a group of Christians from a non-denominational church, he told me that he was so glad we would be sharing with the children and giving them a different view about faith.

Our presentation for these children was about nutrition and dental hygiene, concluded with a gospel message. They all seemed to enjoy the message and were so responsive to us. In fact, afterward Mr. Cal invited us to return next year and bring the dental team, so we'll have to pray about that possibility.

There were over two hundred children in the school, which was really surprising for such a small village in such a secluded area. There's no electricity or indoor plumbing in any of their homes (everyone lives in beautiful rough wood hewn huts with thatched roofs made with palm fronds). Most folks are farmers with livestock running around their property and crops growing here and there. It was such a unique opportunity for us to spend time in this close-knit community and observe how content they seem to be with so little. Please pray for our new friends - for their repentance, faith, and salvation in Jesus.

After making a lunch stop on the way back to PG, we stopped by the dental clinic and a few extra people from the school presentation team stayed with the dental team to help them shut down the clinic. The rest of us went back to the hotel to begin preparing for our final banquet tonight with Gideon, Maylin, and their family. We all gathered together for dinner around 7:00 and Maylin prepared a traditional Belizian meal - rice and beans, stewed chicken (freshly slaughtered from their chicken coop), fresh fish, greens, Johnny cakes (think dense, flat biscuits), and pumpkin bread. Everything was, as usual, so delicious!

As the meal concluded, each of us spent some time reflecting on what we'd learned about God this week, how we'd seen Him at work, and how we will live differently as we return back home. It was so inspiring to listen to each person - young and old alike - share how deeply impacted their lives have been from their experience here this week. Please pray that what God has shown each of us will continue to inspire us and transform us as we serve God and grow in the likeness of the Savior.

After dinner, we drove down to the local ice cream parlor. It's become our tradition on the last night we're in Punta Gorda to treat all the kids we minister to with a free ice cream cone. We reward them with ice cream after they recite the memory verse we taught them and we're always encouraged how every year they remember the verses they were taught from the previous years. So don't ever underestimate the power of ice cream (and Scripture of course)!

It was a wonderful site to behold at that ice cream parlor! There were so many children from town - laughing, talking, taking pictures, and sharing lots of hugs with our team members. Even the owners of the ice cream parlor joined us for a group photo! We gathered everyone together and Gideon shared his testimony for all the kids to hear. We told the kids how much we love them and want them to live for Christ, then we prayed over them, said our final good-byes, and drove back to the hotel. It's always so sad to say good-bye to the kids because we know it will likely be another year before some of us will see them again. However, we trust that God will hold them close, care for their needs, and remind them of how deeply we love them and pray for them.

A few of the older kids came back to the hotel with us. We are developing a scholarship program to help provide financial support for kids who graduate from high school and want to attend college but don't have the means to do so. Steve & Kim Chew are developing this program and there's already one boy who fulfilled the requirements for the program and is receiving scholarship funds to attend college in Belmopan (the Belizian capital). One of the requirements the Chew's have developed for this program is for each perspective scholarship recipient to be video interviewed so others back home can hear their stories and hopefully pledge to provide some of the financial support they need. Pray for guidance as this program is further developed and we have opportunities to minister to the young people of PG in a new and exciting way in helping them prepare for their futures.

Again, thank you for supporting us here through prayer, and in all the other ways you've stood beside us. It has been a fulfilling and encouraging week of service, sharing, and worship and we are already looking forward to the fruit that will be produced from our investment here. Tomorrow, we leave to head back home. Pray for us as we say farewell to our friends and spiritual family here in Belize, and our team goes it's separate ways. It won't be easy to part company, but we are all leaving with hearts full of gratitude and praise for what God has done in us and through us this week.

With much love and deep gratitude for you all,

Tim & the Belize Mission Team