

Village Gospel Mission Trip | 2015



Michael Picchi's Testimony

As we settled into our seats at our designated gate at Sea-Tac International Airport, Jenelle and I let out a sigh of relief. We were ready. We were packed. We were ready to fly, ready to meet up with Pastor Michael and the rest of team in Taiwan. We were ready for whatever the mission trip had in store for us. Little did we know that we would spend the next 24 hours traveling to Taiwan via alternate airlines, airports, and flying coordinates.

We got delayed by air traffic in San Francisco. We got rerouted to different flights. We got

delayed and rerouted by a typhoon. But praise God that nothing can separate us from His love and how He tenderly cares for us.

Months before our trip, when Jenelle and I first talked about the feasibility of us both going on the VGM trip, it seemed like Taiwan was light years away. We thought to ourselves: how in the world are we even going to be able to take time off, let alone pay for all the travel expenses? I love how our God takes care of all the big details as well as the little ones.

God provided more than enough for us to go and some more for all the extra things we needed for travel. When we were in need, God made a way for us; for example, we didn't have any luggage for travel. When I was considering getting a hiking backpack suitable for airport travel, God provided someone selling their slightly used Osprey backpack on Craigslist for a ridiculously low price. God also provided a

rather welcome surprise for us when we arrived in Taiwan—rain! Not only was it raining when we arrived, but the typhoon that had passed near Taiwan had created cooler temperatures. Throughout the trip people repeatedly mentioned how unusually cool the week was.

We were glad to finally see some familiar faces when we met up with the rest of the team at the bus stop in Chiayi. It was a blessing to have such

a large team to serve alongside in the mission field. God gave us people with so many different gifts and talents to make this trip possible. Also, the Taiwan team that Village Gospel Mission had assembled for us to serve with was awesome. Talking to 'We-chat' & Brian, some of the older members on their team, really helped me see the beauty of the VGM ministry. Some of them were too shy to really converse with me at any great length, but you could tell that each one of them had a desire to serve our Lord.



For decades I have been involved with countless types of relational ministries in Churches and para-church ministries. The Village Gospel Mission is one and the same. Just as Jesus lived in relationship with his disciples and the lost sheep of Israel, we get to rub shoulders with saints and sinners alike. We had the opportunity to teach English to many students who struggled in their English studies the previous school year. You could tell that a lot of the students struggled because of difficult

family situations. Coming to the VGM Camp was a source of shame for some students. Many said openly that they did want to be there, and of course who wants to go to extra school classes? Thankfully the VGM material focuses more on getting to know the students personally. Along with teaching the English language and pronunciation, the material encouraged the students to envision their hopes and dreams for their future. Often

the students may not have the opportunity to hope or dream.

During the week-long camp, we were able to show that we cared for each one of our students in our classroom. Building that relationship and trust is so important. Often the first couple of days, you'll wonder to yourself, why did I even come? You feel like you are hitting a brick wall. Then surprise surprise, after a couple days, the kids start to open up once they see you

care. Once they see that you are actually interested in them as a person, not just a student, they begin to trust you.

Thankfully, Phyllis and I were assigned to the same classroom. She was my personal translator for 90% of the week. She always kept me in the loop about what was going on and translated what I need to know. I don't know what I would have done without her all week. Phyllis shared with the students how she used to really struggle

with her English studies in school; in fact, she ended up with one of the worst grades in her class. Throughout her childhood she was really discouraged by this. Graciously, God used her roommate and other friends to reach out to her, and eventually she came to know God and go on to excel in English. She told us that her classmates would have never thought she would succeed. And here, years later, she has succeeded and God is using her to be our primary translator.

Besides loving and encouraging the middle school students in and around Chiayi, the best part of the trip was seeing the Holy Spirit open people's spiritual eyes. Many of the people had not received—let alone heard—the gospel in the rural parts of Taiwan. Some of these students have never heard someone tell them that God loves them and wants to have a personal relationship with them. Some of them did not know there is a local church near



At the middle school during the week, we had several opportunities to share about our faith in Christ. Primarily, we focused on building relationships and inviting the students to a party held afterward at the Church on Saturday. There we had the freedom to openly share the gospel with the students and invite them to receive Christ, as well as connect them with the local church. We had a time of music; magic; and teaching from Pastor Wang.

I didn't understand a single word that Pastor Wang said because it was spoken in Chinese, but I knew that the Gospel was being preached by the oyster shell he held in his hand. Most of us were pretty tired by the end of the week so no one really was able to translate the message. But it was amazing how the Holy Spirit opened many of the students' hearts to receive Christ that day.



- Michael