

DISCOVERING GOD'S CALL

[A YOUNG DEAF MAN'S JOURNEY]

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Javier found his calling and purpose in God in a place he never expected to be. He found it while dirty with mud, exhausted after a long trip, and standing in a Kenyan village in the dark of night. He found it in the smiling faces of fourteen deaf orphans, as he was overwhelmed by their love and kindness.

Javier Reyes is a second-year student in the International Bible Training Center (IBTC) at Deaf Missions. He is the only Deaf person in his family. Growing up, going to church was not a positive experience. There were no interpreters, he was the only Deaf child there; he did not learn what the hearing children were learning.

Javier's mother enrolled him at Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) when he was in the third grade. It was at TSD that Javier started attending local church services that were either interpreted or taught in ASL. His knowledge and appreciation for God and for the Bible began to grow.

After graduating in 2004, and a period of falling away from faith, Javier noticed a booth advertising a Deaf ministry at a TSD homecoming event. He decided to go back to church that following Sunday, where he met Mark Lowenstein, a deaf preacher and former Deaf Missions staff member who helped start the IBTC.

At this point, Javier's fire and passion for the Lord was rekindled. He went to a church where he met Tim Smith (Big Bible Stories: Elijah) and continued to grow spiritually. After Tim came back from the Deaf Christian Leaders Conference at Deaf Missions, he told Javier that Deaf Missions was planning to start a new Bible training school to prepare workers for Deaf ministry. This piqued Javier's interest and moved to Council Bluffs to become one of the first students at the IBTC.

Inspired by Deaf Missions and the IBTC, he finally was able to be in an environment where there were many other deaf Christians and where the Bible teachers were fluent in ASL. The International Bible Training Center was a place where Javier could study the books of the Bible verse by

verse and in much more detail than he could at a normal church service. One of IBTC's requirements is to complete a summer internship. Javier decided to join a team of seven deaf and hearing people on a two-month mission trip to Kenya and Uganda last summer. The team focused on serving the needs of orphaned and abandoned deaf children at two different ministries.

After flying from New York City, and an eight-hour layover in Cairo, Javier and the team finally touched down in Nairobi, Kenya. He was overwhelmed by the initial encounter with the children. Even though they had nothing, they were still so happy. Javier admired them and

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learned to listen to them. The children loved him, and he gave them love in return. He taught them the Bible, English and math. He played soccer with the orphans, and loved to bring them treats.

His experiences in Africa prompted immense spiritual growth, and Javier felt his relationship with God exploded to new levels. His vision for the future is to become a full-time missionary in Kenya. Javier wants to empower these deaf children with career skills they can use to obtain jobs and have a brighter future. He plans to serve a four-month internship in Kenya in 2014 to confirm if this is what God really wants him to do for the foreseeable future.

Javier knows now that God works in amazing ways, and he is grateful to Deaf Missions and the IBTC for being a place where he can study the Bible and find his calling. MF