

what do you believe? AMERICA

Story by Debra Smith
Photos by Geraldine Wilkins

Teens ask questions, share answers about God

This past summer, more than a dozen young people from Calvary Chapel Rio Grande Valley, NM, traveled across the country interviewing Americans about their beliefs. Hitting the streets in 20 cities, the teens began conversations that allowed them to share the Gospel, hand out Bibles, and answer people's questions about God. In the process, they were challenged to grow in their own faith.

Charlie Chavez, a teen from CC Rio Grande Valley, NM, is videotaped giving a biblical answer to the question, "What is the purpose of government?" In the distance is the U.S. Capitol building.



Youth Pastor Shaun Gibson and Carolyn Chavez review Scriptures.



The teens enjoyed seeing historical sites like the Washington Monument.



Caitlin Blea, Annalise Jaramillo, and Patrick Judson pose the question “What is the purpose of government?” to a man visiting Washington, DC. The youth team logged the more than 1,000 conversations in their 7,100-mile journey around the nation. The teens shared their faith with people from a variety of belief systems and backgrounds.

As Charlie Chavez and Alexzandra Jaramillo walked down the street in Charleston, SC, a restaurant hostess stared curiously at them. Noticing the invitation to conversation, the teens walked up to the young woman. “Hi, we’re with the ‘What Do You Believe, America?’ Tour,” Alexzandra began. “We’re traveling across the U.S. interviewing people about their beliefs, and we’re wondering if we can ask you our question of the day: ‘What is truth?’”

As they dialogued, the hostess explained that she had once followed the Lord, but she had become sidetracked. It had been nearly six months since she had attended church or read her Bible. When gently asked if she believed she was right with God, “She said no and came to the verge of tears,” said

Alexzandra. “She knew the Gospel, but she needed encouragement to revive her relationship with God.”

The team members emphasized the importance of reading the Bible and offered prayer, which was eagerly accepted. “We asked God that she would have an unquenchable desire to know Him and that she would not be willing to live apart from Him,” said Alexzandra.

The Vision: Communicating Christ

The team had more than a thousand such conversations as they traveled. Their 31-day journey was designed with three goals: To share the Gospel, to learn about the spiritual heritage of the United States, and to

teach students to dialogue confidently about their faith.

The team of 13 high school and college students and four adults traveled more than 7,100 miles. Their RV was emblazoned with their blog address and the words “What Do You Believe, America?” Splitting into pairs for outreach, the teens approached people daily with questions such as, *Who is God?* or, *What is the greatest problem facing humanity today?* Whenever interviewees displayed interest in spiritual matters, the youth proceeded to share the Gospel.

Describing his vision for the trip, Youth Pastor Shaun Gibson said that previously, “We realized we weren’t preparing our teens to share their faith as vigorously as we

could.” He explained that on the group’s previous mission trips to Peru and Mexico, “our team members couldn’t talk one-on-one with people about the Gospel because of the language barrier.”

Thinking Biblically

Shaun led the tour and the pre-trip training. “We did 12 weeks of intensive discipleship,” explained Shaun, “starting before the trip, continuing through it, and afterward—to integrate the things learned into everyday life.” The team memorized 24 Bible verses, read the books of Genesis through Judges, and completed an *Intensive Discipleship Course* published by Youth With A Mission.

The group also used Focus on the Family’s DVD worldview course, *The Truth Project*.

Shaun explained that the goal was to gain a biblical perspective on all issues: “God has spoken about everything—relationships, marriage, government, origins, economics. Our faith isn’t one compartment of our life; it flavors everything.”

To learn to recognize the influences shaping their thinking, “We did a media fast,” said Shaun. “This meant no TV or secular radio unless the person wrote a report about it afterward.”

Alexzandra commented, “This fast had major benefits. It made us evaluate what we put in our heads—much of which is so contrary to what we want to be as God’s people.”

From Fear to Faith

The team set out in July, with one thing remaining to be gained on the trip itself: Boldness. “Approaching someone and sharing the Gospel was so scary,” Charlie said, laughing.

Shaun said that after the team’s first outreach in Amarillo, TX, “The teens said they had felt frozen, terrified.” But a few weeks later, “They were learning to talk comfortably about spiritual things.”

In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul. Psalm 138:3



Charlie Chavez chats with a family visiting monuments in Washington, DC.





Dorothy Gibson responds to a woman's questions. Dorothy, Shaun's wife, was one of four adults who joined the 13 high school and college students.



Team members pray in front of the WWII Memorial. In addition to sharing the Gospel, the teens learned about America's history and spiritual heritage.

Team member Dominique Taylor said, "During the trip, God stripped me of fear. Every day was a struggle to go out and witness, but I didn't want that to prevent me from being used by God."

A Range of Reactions

The team received a variety of responses. In New York, a contractor "said he didn't have time for God," recounted Charlie. Gesturing to the hustle and bustle around them, the man exclaimed, "Look at this—everyone's so busy; we don't have time for religion."

Nevertheless, the conversation lasted about 45 minutes. Alexzandra commented, "He expressed more interest once he realized we really had studied the Bible." After sharing the Gospel, Alexzandra added, "I think it's incredible that the God of the universe

would send His own Son down to earth for us. If He did something that extreme so we could spend eternity with Him, it must be important."

The team members offered to pray with the man and gave him a Bible. "We prayed that God would show him the importance of a relationship with Him," said Alexzandra. Charlie reported that he seemed excited to have the Bible and indicated he would read it.

In Philadelphia, Austin Triplett and Dominique talked with three girls about the question "Who is Jesus Christ?" The girls "were kind of confused," said Dominique. After she explained that Jesus is God's Son who came to earth, one of the girls asked how to get to heaven. Dominique replied that all people have sinned and sin brings



A teen camera crew from CC Rio Grande Valley asked visitors in Washington, DC, "What is the purpose of government?" Often those they interviewed were open to hear this interest gave the teens opportunity to share their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

death, so a person can enter heaven only by accepting the forgiveness Jesus offered through His sacrifice on the cross. She explained, "You can't be good enough."

The girls continued asking questions. "They wanted to know about the Trinity, how three—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—could be one. They were totally interested in God," said Dominique.

The team members offered the girls Bibles. "We wrote their names in them, and I added a blessing that they would seek God with all their hearts," said Dominique. "As they left, they said, 'Thank you; that was awesome.'"

A Defense for Hope

Inspired by conversations and experiences on the trip, "The teens are studying more

since we got back," commented Shaun. Team member Kristen Judson, a freshman in college, is reading *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis and *World Religions in a Nutshell* by Ray Comfort.

"On the trip," said Dominique, "I realized I was unprepared to answer some of the questions people asked. Now that I'm home, I'm preparing myself by learning about science, art, history, and philosophy."

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear. 1 Peter 3:15

Dominique, also a college freshman, added, "I've discovered that some things I believed are not biblical. Now I'm constantly asking myself, *What does the Bible say about this?* It's crucial to think biblically about everything—it protects you from being swayed by false ideas. Without what I learned on this trip, the things I'm hearing in my philosophy class might be prompting me to doubt."

Truth with Compassion

The trip impacted hearts as well as minds. Team member Patrick Judson commented, "Before the trip, I didn't really care about people and whether they went to heaven or hell. This summer, God gave me a love for others."

Charlie said, "Now I see people differently. When I look around in a store or on the

street, I think, *What's going on in their lives? Do they know Christ? How could I tell them?*"

Shaun explained, "As Christians, if we see a need, we're supposed to meet it. We're living in a pretty affluent culture, and what people really need is truth. We saw people's desperate need for truth, so that's what we gave out this summer." ☞

The team's video report can be viewed at wdyba.blogspot.com

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