

Jamaica

Youth Team Shares God's Grace Amidst a Sea of Need

Story by Carmel Palmer
Photos by Sara Fenton

"God's net includes all kinds of people we would not think are worthy to be saved," proclaimed Chris Morris to the crowd at Junction Baptist Church in Jamaica. Sweat beaded on his brow. This was his second visit back home since leaving his nation 12 years ago. He had been apprehensive on the plane ride over, aware of his people's tendency not to receive well from their own. "God loves the prostitutes, the drug addicts, the ones you and I walk past on the streets ..." he continued

Now as he stood before them, Chris wondered how they would receive a message that seemed strange in Jamaican culture. Silently relinquishing his fears to God, he continued—"But God is merciful and compassionate, desiring all to come to repentance and faith. ... Jonah's job was to cast the net and let God sort out the rest!" As his eyes scanned the congregation, Chris saw receptiveness rather than defensiveness. When his sermon was finished, many told him they had a new passion for reaching their community with God's grace.

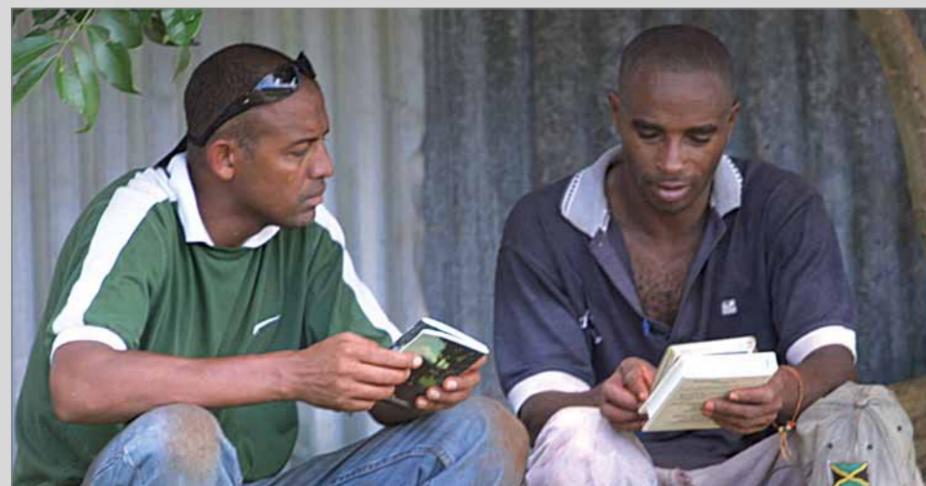
Last July, Chris and his son Matt were part of a weeklong mission trip from Cornerstone Chapel of Leesburg, VA, to Junction, Jamaica. Six leaders and 24 teenagers served through medical missions, community outreaches, door-to-door evangelism, church maintenance, and an orphanage visit.

Breaking the Ice

Mike Frick, trip leader and youth pastor at Cornerstone Chapel, asked Chris to join the team because of his familiarity with Jamaica. Though Chris gave the team cultural tips, he was impressed by how natu-

rally the American teens perched on dirty steps outside strangers' homes to share the Gospel. Three-times team member Lindsey Cook witnessed to deaf Jamaicans with sign language. The believers used colored bracelets to share the salvation story, including black for sin, red for Christ's sacrifice, and green for growth in Him.

A striped ball communicated the same message on the soccer field. Before games, clouds of marijuana smoke rose from the gathered Jamaicans, many of whom were drug dealers and gang members. Unfazed, the team shared testimonies during pauses in play. "Twenty years ago I was here, practically living on the soccer field with no direction in life," related Chris as his son looked on. "The military took me from physical poverty, but Jesus Christ saved me from real—spiritual—poverty."



Chris Morris, left, of Cornerstone Chapel in Leesburg, VA, explains how to study the Bible to a Jamaican man. The trip was Chris' second back to the country of his birth.

Hope for the Hurting

The team brought dental and infant care supplies to distribute, so on Tuesday several believers located a shady spot under a mango tree. To their shock and delight, the group soon learned they were situated directly across from an understaffed medical clinic. The center offered a different service each day and would focus next on dental hygiene and neonatal care—fields requiring the very resources the team had brought.

The overwhelmed clinic staff were thrilled to have extra supplies and help. For hours at a time, believers led the waiting room in praise and worship. Though many had walked miles and were waiting all day to be seen, tired faces became joyful amidst songs. Robyn Olson shared a water bottle, granola bar, and the Gospel with an overwhelmed single mother. The women prayed and wept



Logan Nelson, left, Lindsey Cook, Kelsey Farenholtz, and Cori Goodwin, all from Cornerstone Chapel, share with Jamaican teens and children during a work break.



Lindsey Cook, left, helps lead a song with hand movements during Sunday school. Jamaican D. J. Collier follows along as he learns the song.



Robyn Olson holds a mother's baby and prays for both at a medical clinic.

together as the Jamaican received Christ. “She revealed her heart,” Robyn said. “She needed comfort.”

At New Hope Children’s Home, an orphanage in Chris’ old neighborhood, the teens held and played with special-needs children. Chris’ son Matt remembered one little girl who, though unable to feed herself, affectionately sought to hug the visitors with her entire body. Everyone was silent on the ride back. Chris reflected, “These kids were disowned by no fault of their own—but we got to share Christ’s love with them.”

Unity from Diversity

The team was amazed by how Junction Baptist Church members, in Matt’s words, “took us in with open hearts.” Yet there were cultural differences to overcome. According to Chris, Jamaican Christians tend to emphasize repentance and righteousness, while the team highlighted grace. “Our perspective was, ‘Repentance is important, but let’s also reach out with love and serve amidst the sea of needs around us,’” said Mike. “Eventually, the two worlds collided.” At a mountaintop outreach where Mike was meant to share his testimony, there was great excitement because a gang leader who had previously heard Chris speak on the soccer field had brought his followers to hear. But when a Jamaican believer’s introduction of Mike turned into a fire-and-brimstone sermon, Chris and Mike watched through tears as people walked away one by one. Yet, once standing at the podium, Mike glimpsed one local who hadn’t left. “That man got his drugs the same place everyone else did,” Mike said. “But for some reason, he stayed and listened.” Afterward he spoke with the Jamaican, who has since joined the church.

The teens worked long hours in searing heat installing windows, painting, and clearing thorny brush. Serving together created unity between the Americans and Jamaicans. Sixteen-year-old Kelsey Farenholtz was picking up trash and rotten mangoes on the church property when D.J. Collier, a 9-year-old Jamaican, appeared. His help made the unpleasant task fun: “We had contests filling our buckets,” Kelsey said. As they walked along the road gathering windblown trash, D.J. reached down and plucked a flower for Kelsey. She has it still, pressed carefully between the pages of her journal.

At the week’s end, Kelsey sat with newfound friends in a pickup truck under a mango tree at the back of the church property. Though the week had started out awkwardly, she now felt the unity in the body of Christ as never before. She reflected, “That moment was incredible because we had grown together and seen God unify us. Watching barriers come down was amazing.”

Cornerstone Chapel, VA

www.cornerstonechapel.net
church@cornerstonechapel.net
703-771-1500



The city of Junction is located in the southwest of the Caribbean nation.



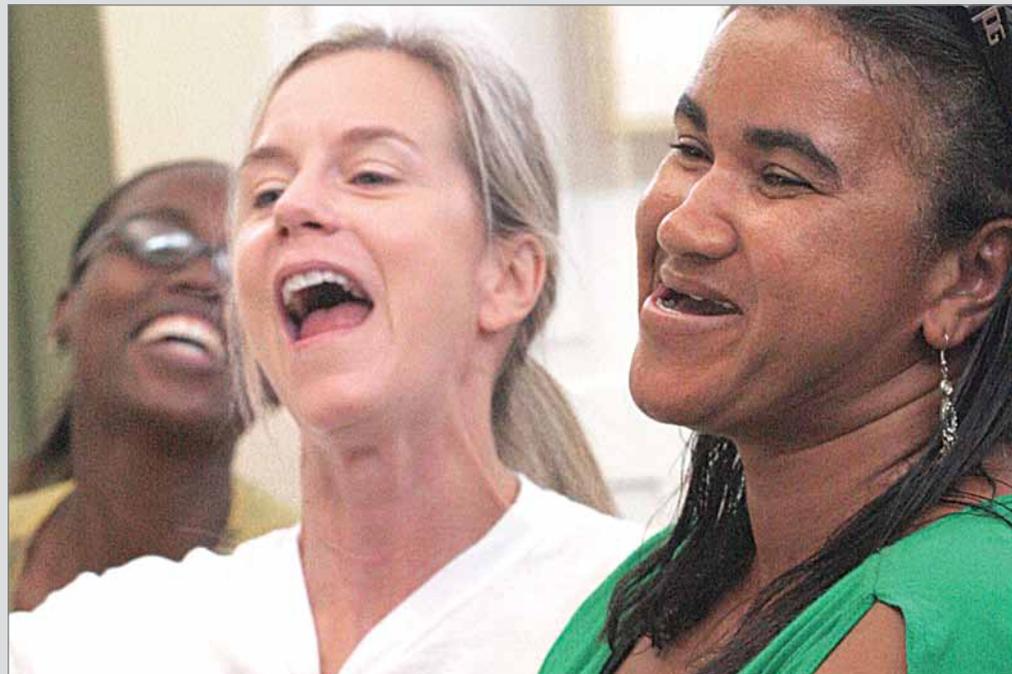
Mike Frick



Ben Hardy and Wade VonKleeck clear brush from the church’s front yard.



Junction Baptist Church needed paint, new windows, and yardwork. Cornerstone Chapel worked alongside local believers to fix up the property.



Robyn, center, sings praise with patients and workers in a clinic’s waiting room.