

Internet Opens World to Physically Ill Evangelist

Tony used to rely on heavy labor for income. But, over the years, as multiple sclerosis has taken its toll, he has labored another way—most recently, by ministering to people around the world using a Dell desktop computer.

Tony lives in Queens, N.Y., where many of his neighbors recently felt the impact of Hurricane Sandy. Thankfully, there was no damage to the home he shares with his wife, 16-year-old son and father. It's hard for Tony to get around, and it's not easy to leave home—two reasons he turned to online ministry as a way to share his faith.

Tony was diagnosed with MS as a teenager and went on disability five years ago.

“Over the years, little by little, it started slowing me down,” he said. Tony can walk, but has to be careful; his balance isn't what it used to be.

Tony thinks about Paul's letter to the Corinthian church when the apostle wrote about “a thorn in my flesh.” Whatever the debilitating problem was that hindered his work, Paul learned that God's grace is sufficient. He writes in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, “Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses. ... For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Tony feels the same way about MS. “It's really difficult, but I believe ... this is my thorn,” he said. “If this is what it took for me to get close to God, ... then it's a blessing.”

Several months ago, Tony searched the Internet for a way he could serve God from home. That's when he found out about Search for Jesus, BGEA's Internet evangelism ministry. He prayed about it, then filled out a form online to apply to

volunteer.

He received training and was approved as an e-counselor in September. He chats with people around the globe who find the ministry's evangelistic website, . Online visitors have all kinds of spiritual questions.

Because Tony's condition makes it hard to attend church, he regularly listens to radio and TV sermons and takes notes, which he uses when communicating with people online. He reads the Bible at least twice a day and prays "about almost everything."

The day he spoke about his experience as an e-counselor, there were a couple of inches of snow on the ground and a nor'easter outside his home.

"I don't have to worry about leaving the house," he said.

Through Search for Jesus, he can reach people in their moment of need, regardless of the weather in Queens. He volunteers in the afternoons before his wife gets home from work.

Tony refers to the Great Commission in which Christ told His followers to spread the Gospel. "That's what we're supposed to do, is introduce people to Christ," he said.

Of course, he wasn't always so excited about serving God. He accepted Christ when he was young, but thought that meant his life would be perfect from then on.

"It's not easy to be a Christian," Tony said. "Every day requires Christians to work at it and rely on God's grace so they can set a good example for others."

He has learned that after years of living with MS.

Before Tony chats with people online, he prays that God would speak through him.

"These are His people," he said. "I'm just here to try to do my part and serve Him." So how does he feel afterwards? "Sometimes really, really good. Sometimes a little concerned for the people."

But even when Tony wrestles with feelings of inadequacy, he knows God is in control.

"I believe every chat makes a difference because I believe it's His will that God wants me to talk to these people," he said.

He prays for each person after his chats.

One man in particular touched Tony's heart. The man was worried about his salvation, and Tony was able to relate to him as he thought back to the same kind of feelings from his youth. He told the man that no one is perfect; we're all sinners. But God forgives us when we ask for it and provides strength to keep going.

Tony encourages others interested in volunteering with Search for Jesus to pray about it and see where God leads them. For more information about the ministry, visit [.](#)