

Witch Doctor: 'Just Tell Him to Bring That Jesus With Him'

Every 20 seconds, a child somewhere across the globe prays to put his or her faith in Jesus while participating in The Greatest Journey, a global children's discipleship program that is spreading like wildfire. In a time when roughly six in 10 church leaders in the U.S. feel that churches are not discipling well, The Greatest Journey is providing a model for effectively helping children become faithful followers of Jesus.

"We are witnessing astounding results as children learn to tell their families and communities about God's love. More than 70 percent of children who graduate from the program are actively praying and sharing their faith with others," said Randy Riddle, domestic director of Operation Christmas Child.

Since 2010, more than 11 million children have participated in The Greatest Journey, which is offered by local church groups around the world to children who receive Operation Christmas Child shoebox gifts.

Each year, Operation Christmas Child, a project of Samaritan's Purse, distributes shoebox gifts filled with school supplies, hygiene items and fun toys to children in need in more than 100 countries. At shoebox outreach events, local Christians share the Gospel, inviting children to trust in Jesus. Then boys and girls receive a surprise that may be their first gift ever—a tangible expression of God's love. After they receive shoebox gifts, many children also participate in The Greatest Journey, a 12-lesson discipleship program offered through the local church. Through this course, which includes Bible stories and Scripture memorization, they learn how to follow Christ in their daily lives as they share Him with friends and family.

Melvin, age 11, was one of 30 children who enrolled in the program after receiving a shoebox gift on the island of Vanua Levu in Fiji. During lesson one, the pastor spoke about the creation of the world, highlighting that man was made in God's image. Melvin was so moved by the teaching that he accepted Jesus Christ at the end of that lesson.

"My life changed completely," said Melvin, who immediately began to tell his family and friends what he was learning during the program. He drew pictures on pages of The Greatest Journey and posted them on the wall in his home for his grandparents and siblings to see.

During the course of the Bible study, Melvin's grandfather, a witch doctor, became sick and was unable to leave his room for a month. He asked Melvin to call his pastor to come and pray for him, and said, "Just tell him to bring that Jesus with him. I want to know that Jesus."

Word quickly spread through the village that the witch doctor had become a Christian and was completely healed. Parents and siblings of The Greatest Journey students wanted to learn about Jesus, too, so they sat in on the class. When the course ended, villagers asked the pastor to continue his six-hour walks to their village every week to teach them. He agreed, and a Bible study formed when Melvin's grandmother and three other members of the community became believers.

Today, more than 80 villagers regularly attend services in their new church building. The children continue to share their faith with others, and five additional churches have been started in surrounding villages.

"Operation Christmas Child is about so much more than a shoebox. It is a tangible expression of God's love that starts children on a journey to understanding the greatest gift of all: Jesus," said Riddle. "Once a child becomes a Christian, discipleship is essential for learning how to trust God, serve

Him and tell others about Jesus.

“There is huge potential for exponential gospel impact through The Greatest Journey, and we have seen entire communities like Melvin’s be changed. One of the 12 lessons encourages children to share the gospel with at least three friends. If every child who has enrolled in the program did this, more than 33 million children would have heard the Good News!”

To find out more about Operation Christmas Child and The Greatest Journey discipleship program, visit . {eo}