

Miracles From Mysteries: How a Young Man's Tragic Death Led to Thousands of Salvations

The gospel follows the water. That's what two young women—left nameless here for their safety—discovered when they introduced the gospel to their remote village.

The women had been taken from the village more than a year before, lured by a job offer then violated and captured by sex traffickers. They were ultimately rescued when a border guard became suspicious and pulled them away from their captors. They were later put into a safe house run by Christians.

Over the next year, they received physical and emotional healing, along with the gospel of Jesus Christ. They wanted to return to their village to share the gospel, but felt too ashamed by their violations to go back.

If we had a business, they thought, we could return as contributing members of the community. We could bolster the economy and share the gospel. That's when their Christian leader was put in contact with Jordan Lewis Missions (JLM).

The women's request was simple: sewing machines so they could repair and make clothes. Ron Lewis, co-founder and gospel strategist at JLM, encouraged them to ask for more. So the women asked for a pair of goats.

Ron pushed them to dream bigger still and asked for their most exorbitant request. This time they asked for a water well, which would cost a few thousand U.S. dollars. JLM honored their request.

When the women returned to the village and the water well was installed, they quickly became empowered leaders who blessed the entire community. The well served as a central hub for the community, and while the villagers drew water, the women shared the gospel with them. Today this village has five churches.

“When we started installing these water pumps in villages, it became obvious we were addressing a real humanitarian issue on numerous levels,” Ron says. “Because JLM is about reaching the unreached with the gospel, our conviction was to not only share water, but also Living Water.

“To our great surprise, three to five underground churches are starting for almost every water pump we provide. The gospel is going forward and it reminds us of Jesus meeting with the woman at the well. He said to her, ‘You’re drinking from natural water, but drink this water I give you so that you’ll never thirst again.’ That’s one of our strategies, and it’s been incredibly effective.”

Success stories like the women’s are not uncommon for JLM which has invested in 15 nations, including five of the 10 most dangerous nations for Christian persecution, according to Open Doors’ 2019 World Watch List.

God has opened avenues for JLM’s work in some of the harshest environments for Christians in the world:

In China, JLM has trained 14 teams to go and reach 14 UPGs who have never heard the gospel.

In Pakistan, two house churches started in 2015 through JLM, have multiplied to 2,600 underground churches as of last December, with over 17,000 salvations.

In North Korea, the most dangerous country in the world to be a Christian, JLM partners with underground churches providing Bibles, food aid, and even some rescues with North Korean

defectors.

In India, several churches have been built among UUPGs that are considered some of the least reached people in the entire nation.

JLM is also actively engaged in Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh and Indonesia. The work is so sensitive in these nations that it can't be listed here for security reasons.

JLM has provided strategy and provision for launching micro-churches in NYC led by Muslim-background believers who reach Muslims with the gospel.

JLM focuses on reaching the roughly 32 million people with limited or no access to the gospel. An unreached people group (UPG) is defined as an ethnic group without an indigenous, self-propagating Christian church or gospel movement. An unengaged, unreached people group (UUPG) goes a step further: The term denotes a people group with no known active gospel outreach or church planting effort of any kind (e.g., those that have no individual or organization targeting them with the gospel).

These are the people that compel Ron and his wife, Lynette, who say they're not interested in simply introducing the world to American Christianity delivered by American missionaries. Rather, they want to support what God is already doing in the region through locals whose hearts have been stirred to see their people meet the Lord.

Outreach Becomes Therapy

Conceived almost by accident in the wake of tragedy, JLM is proof of God's ability to bring forth miracles from tragedy.

Jordan Lewis Missions' namesake—Ron and Lynette's son Jordan—died at age 23 after battling a rare form of sinus cancer. Three days after Jordan's death, Ron remembers waking

up suddenly, sitting up straight in bed.

“Out of nowhere, I hear the words, ‘Who will pick up this mantle?’” Ron says. “It was a serious question and immediately I recalled how one of the primary highlights of Jordan’s life was serving God in Tanzania just weeks before he was diagnosed with cancer. Jordan described it as never feeling more alive than when he was in Tanzania reaching an unengaged, unreached people group. This must be the mantle God is highlighting.”

But Ron didn’t act on that word right away. How could he? He was in the middle of Jordan’s memorial services, dealing with logistical arrangements, family and all of the personal trauma and pain that accompanies the death of a child.

A couple days later, the Lewis family was together in Jordan’s apartment, watching flowers from loved ones pour in. One of Jordan’s brothers or friends commented that Jordan wouldn’t be so interested in all these flowers, so “Why don’t we ask people to give to the unreached, unengaged people he so loved?”

So the family got the word out that while they appreciated the flowers and outpouring of love, if anyone wanted to give toward Jordan’s favorite mission, they could send donations to the Missions Office at Oral Roberts University (ORU), Jordan’s alma mater.

“Three months later, the chief legal counsel and the CFO of ORU, realized their own restrictions in managing these funds due to State Department regulations,” Ron says. “They asked me if I would move it into one of our nonprofits or one of our churches.”

Ron moved JLM under the 501(c)(3) covering of King’s Park International Church in Durham, North Carolina—where Ron already serves as founding and senior minister.

He clarifies that JLM is strictly a charitable organization

with only one part-time staff member—JLM executive director Wayne Graham—who is funded by Kings Park, so that all of the money donated to JLM goes straight to the mission.

“Serving a nonprofit mission may seem like an odd coping mechanism for grief,” Ron admits. “Not everyone recovers from tragedy, and we personally understand the challenges of living beyond the pain.”

He continues: “For us the best thing is to keep moving forward—heal and share and get out of our shell and out of our trauma. We feel rewarded, just through the giving of our lives away—and even more when we give the gospel away and people meet Jesus.”

Lynette says the Lewis family had little left to give after Jordan’s death. But they gave what they could, like the boy with the loaves and fishes in John 6, and God multiplied it beyond belief.

“When Jordan died, we were so spent,” Lynette says. “We felt so out of wind, out of faith, out of energy. And yet we said, ‘OK, God, what can we do? Maybe something small? Let’s just create a fund where people can give for the cause Jordan loved so much.’

“So we spent a little time doing that, people started giving, one thing leads to another, and before long, amazing things are happening through the help of the Lord, things so far bigger than anything we could have imagined.”

In May, Lynette preached on Mother’s Day at Life Fellowship Church in Athens, Texas, on what she calls four mysteries people face in life—the mystery of waiting, the mystery of different, the mystery of loss and the mystery of multiplication. From firsthand experience, she shared how God can transform mysteries into miracles.

“John 12:24 says, ‘Unless the seed falls into the ground and

dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it will bear much fruit,'" Lynette says. "That's what we've seen through Jordan's example—his life, his passion. It got picked up by Ron initially and now by hundreds of others around the world who share that mission to reach the UPGs of the world. Now to see all these churches popping up? It's just extraordinary."

Ron says leading JLM in memory of his son has been "healing" for him. And he believes in that healing process and aims to follow the example of Jesus.

"When Jesus lost His cousin John the Baptist whose head was cut off—on an emotional human level, that had to be traumatic," Ron says. "But the first thing Jesus did after a brief time of grieving was He went out and healed people. I think that's a little piece of how we've been able to recover and are still recovering. We go out to heal... 'Let's start one more church. Let's give one more water pump. Let's give 10 more Bibles or train 100 more evangelists for UUPGs. Let's keep the Good News flowing and going. Let's just keep spreading the gospel.' So what started with Jordan in Tanzania, then went to one or two nations and is now in more than a dozen nations. It just keeps spreading."

Good Deeds, Good News

Lynette remembers when she was young and missionaries would come through town and speak to her local church. The church would raise funds for the missionaries to minister in a distant country.

Today JLM, like many other ministries, operates on a different model. "Missionaries" who don't have the resources or life flexibility to drop everything and move to another country—no matter how passionate about the Great Commission they may be—can still go. Most, particularly in the United States, can financially support nationals doing kingdom ministry in their own unreached, unengaged nation.

“Some of us go, some preach, but most send,” Lynette says. “That’s really the bottom line. Most of us will be a sender, a funder, a giver—and that is vital and essential for the mission. In fact, it could be THE primary catalyst to doing the work of the gospel around the world. See yourself as a sender, as someone who raises up missionaries and helps put them on the field. When you give and you invest, that’s really what you can call yourself: You’re a missionary sender.”

“We have twin 5-year-old daughters now [who were born three months before Jordan died],” Ron says. “I can’t go travel the world every month. But here’s what I can do: I can back somebody who’s already there.”

Lynette agrees: “I personally would be the least likely to go myself. But putting my time and energy and effort into sending those who will go, makes me feel like I’m as much a part of the missionary team as those going.”

So how does JLM identify kingdom-minded locals without staff on the ground? Early in his ministry while in his 20’s, Ron started building a network of international students studying in the U.S. who had a passion for Jesus. He recognized that when they returned home, they were often in the “top echelon of society”—influential, financially well-off individuals. Some of them also went on to plant churches and start ministries internationally. They now provide leadership and key connections for JLM as it grows and expands.

“To me, this is a significant shift in missions,” Ron says. “These places we are working in are the darkest of nations. I mean, who really wants to go to Iraq right now? Who wants to go to Afghanistan? Yet there are people on the ground right now who are eager to work and go, those who are going to do a much better job than we can. Why don’t we water them? By water, I’m referencing Proverbs 11 that says whoever waters will himself be watered. So that is what our calling has become—out of our dry places of grief, into watering the

nations.”

Resources provided by JLM goes to a variety of kingdom opportunities. Sometimes it's funding a water pump or a water well for a village. Other times it means providing start-up money to build a hybrid church/community center for the unreached. It can be as simple as buying a \$5 Bible and as complicated as arranging logistics to screen The Jesus Film for hundreds of people in a remote tribal village that's exclusively Muslim or another religion. In almost all situations though, the gospel is shared after tangible, practical work is done for the community.

“The people are very receptive to the gospel, because it's good news,” Ron says. “And it's not only good news—it's good deeds, followed by good news.”

A clear example of this philosophy in action is the installation of water pumps in regions where water is scarce. In Pakistan, a Christian woman named Asia Bibi was incarcerated on false charges after she drank water from a Muslim-owned well. She was kept in prison for several years on charges of blasphemy. This compels JLM to fund wells and pumps where everyone—whether Muslim, Hindu or Christian—can come get water and freely talk without fear of reprisal. Ron says the invitation is the same as the prophet Isaiah's: “Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters” (Isa. 55:1a).

“Having access to water is a human right, as it's a necessity for survival,” Ron says. “... In the places where we serve the unreached, they often drink impure and even disease-ridden water. We are changing that one well at a time.”

He goes on to explain, “The greatest source of pain in the world is the evil in the human heart and catastrophes as a result of the fall of mankind. Only the gospel of Jesus can change a calloused, sickened heart, and that's why we believe the gospel of Jesus is also a human right because it changes

hearts and lives and drives evil out of humanity. So for JLM the gospel will always follow the water. Water and the gospel go hand in hand. We love that the water pumps help in sustaining life, and watching the gospel bring forth eternal life, for us is even more joyful.”

Prayerful Posturing

But none of this good would have been possible without the Lewises’ humble willingness to pick up the mantle Jordan left behind—even when they felt too weak to carry that mantle. It’s a complicated and bittersweet subject for Ron and Lynette, who still don’t understand why Jordan’s life ended at such a young age, yet choose to trust God anyway.

“Seeing what the Lord is doing around the world through JLM and through our work doesn’t bring Jordan back,” Lynette says. “It doesn’t replace him. But it does feel fruitful. And that’s what I found in my many grief journeys ... that God will help you bear fruit in ways that you would not have chosen, would not have expected, but in ways you’re so glad to receive. We are humbled by what God’s done through JLM around the world, and we’re grateful. It doesn’t take away the pain, but it does cause us to feel fruitful.”

“All of us will go through crisis or tragedy at least one time in our lives—some of us more than once,” Ron says. “On the other side of every great challenge or crisis is opportunity—opportunity to surrender to God, even when you don’t like the situation you’ve been dealt. It is a relentless choice to not let go, even though you don’t understand. It’s like Jacob wrestling with the angel of the Lord, and Jacob is just not letting go. When it’s over, he’s limping. We too, have these limps. We have these broken areas of our lives. Yet we know that God and His covenant will not fail us. So we hang on.”

Lynette says she finds solace in knowing that through her

experience, she can minister to so many going through similar heartache.

“What we get from God in our trials is what we can give to others,” Lynette says. “The Word of God tells us that we are comforted in our suffering so that we know how to comfort others. So I’m often pondering, ‘How can I use this experience to be helpful for someone else who’s suffering?’ And it really helps me endure and feel like there’s fruit amidst loss.”

This is the story and mission of JLM. In short: People who have gone through unimaginable pain are letting God use that pain to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to the most remote villages on Earth. As Paul the apostle said, “...what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel” (Phil. 1:12).

Ron and Lynette say they know that death is not the end for a Christian. They will see their son again one day in heaven, and hope to be joined there by as many people as possible who were reached through the work of JLM.

“The world in darkness without the gospel is in so much greater peril than we as believers are with our trials and even our most horrendous human tragedies,” Ron says. “Whether it’s losing a son, a marriage, a job or health, we can honestly say God sent His Son who died on the cross and rose from the grave and wrote our names in the Book of Life—and that’s enough.

“God is the only one who can make sense out of our suffering. It takes time and sometimes we don’t ever get our ultimate questions answered on this side of Heaven. Sometimes our rejoicing is by faith. Often our praises are a sacrifice of praise when we don’t have answers. Nevertheless, here’s what we know: We know that God is faithful. We know that God is not a man that He should lie. And we know that God is good, all the time.” {eo}

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