

Jesus' Model of Ministry: The World Race

Enough was enough.

Bags packed and wearing a "Something Wonderful Is About to Happen" T-shirt, Arlene—a young Filipino girl trapped in the sex industry—said goodbye to a life of catcalls and abuse as a bar girl in the Philippines' Angeles City.

Walking hand in hand with a few unexpected friends called "racers," Arlene left the rundown apartment she shared with other bar girls and said, "Yes," to a brand-new start.

Arlene, who now attends college and rescues other girls like herself, is one of many participants in the World Race, an Adventures in Missions ministry that features an 11-month mission trip to 11 countries. Through the World Race, thousands of young people are breaking out of their comfort zones and answering the call of Jesus Christ to serve the "least of these"—wherever He may lead.

"There's something so powerful about walking in Jesus' footsteps and letting Him wreck your life," says Seth Barnes, founder and executive director of the World Race. "We've found that Jesus hangs out at the garbage dumps and in the hopeless places of the earth, and our idea is to come alongside Him as He works there."

Kingdom Journeys

Before there was a World Race, Barnes started what he called a "Kingdom Journey"—a real-life journey through the world to prepare people for their lifelong journey of faith. But Barnes' dedication to missions really began as a senior at Wheaton College when he was deeply moved by the stories of refugees fleeing Cambodia to escape the Khmer Rouge—a guerilla

force responsible for the deaths of 2 million people.

"I dropped everything," says Barnes, who left his school and girlfriend and flew to Thailand to work in a refugee camp. "I felt God saying, 'Go care for My people.'"

Barnes would never be the same. He returned from Thailand, married his girlfriend, Karen, and the newlyweds moved to Indonesia and eventually the Dominican Republic to do economic development work. It was at this time that God began to show Barnes what it meant to have a personal relationship with Jesus—something he had never fully grasped.

"I heard God say to me ... how much He loves me. That changed everything. I moved from being a good worker for God to accepting my sonship and His care for me," Barnes says.

This new level of intimacy got Barnes thinking: "How do we do what Jesus did in His day and age? How can we be that for a generation? How can we take them on a journey that looks like Jesus' journey with His disciples?"

These questions were preparing Barnes for a brand-new adventure. In the late 1980s, God presented the Barnes family with an opportunity to start a ministry that would mobilize young people to do the work of Jesus. To start, Barnes had to raise funds, a task that seemed impossible. They decided if they were able to raise \$10,000 within the first month that it was a sign the Lord had spoken.

When the money didn't come in, "I was quite happy," Barnes says. "I celebrated by going skiing."

But when he returned, all the money had in fact come in. His obedience eventually led to the formation of Adventures in Missions (Adventures)—the parent organization of the World Race.

Jesus' Model of Ministry

Since starting out in a garage in 1989, more than 100,000 people have entered the mission field through Adventures.

"We really believe that Jesus used short-term missions as His model," says Clint Bokelman, director of discipleship at Adventures. For three years Jesus raised the dead, healed the sick and cast out demons. He even sent His disciples on short-term missions of their own.

Bokelman got a taste of Jesus' model of ministry about 20 years ago when he and his wife took their church's youth group to Mexico. Using an evangelistic training program that he "thought was the most complete presentation of the gospel," Bokelman found himself getting nowhere. After presenting the message to a woman for about 20 minutes, Bokelman says his translator turned to him and said, "Would you please just tell this woman about Jesus?"

The translator was Barnes. The first World Race began in 2006. Participants were given funds to buy a van and travel from northern to southern Mexico where they ministered through a local church. The following year, Barnes began structuring the World Race into the movement it is today.

About 1,000 young people between the ages of 21 and 35 participate each year, and racers have the option to choose the countries they would like to visit. A typical route might include Albania, Romania, Malawi, Zambia, Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile.

The World Race also offers what's called a Gap Year, a nine-month mission trip for college-aged students between the ages of 18 and 22.

Participants are split into squads of 35-50 people and then again in teams of six.

Each team is sent to different areas to work with local ministries, churches and orphanages.

“In each country we have a large number of contacts and we come and serve those ministry partners,” Barnes says.

Racers, for example, have the opportunity to build relationships with Thailand’s sex trafficking victims through Lighthouse in Action; get to know street kids in the Philippines through Kids International Ministries; and help care for the orphans of Swaziland through El Shaddai Ministries.

Racers also visit the streets and bars of Angeles City, where thousands of girls are trapped in the horrors of the sex trade, says Kenny Sacht, founder and executive director of Wipe Every Tear, a ministry that offers housing and education to those women.

In fact, it was Wipe Every Tear that led racers to Arlene.

“I believe God is going to use racers and racer alumni to greatly impact the world,” Sacht says.

A Crisis of Faith

For Taylor Hill, a World Racer, participating meant giving up her dream job of working for a music label in Nashville.

Shortly before graduating from college at the University of Colorado Boulder in May 2014, Hill was offered a position she had been waiting for only to turn it down for the World Race.

Feeling as though she wasn’t a dedicated believer, Hill wanted God to completely envelop her life. She was through with half-hearted Christianity. Her journey began in Guatemala in July 2014.

The first time she walked into a rundown hospital there, she couldn’t quite wrap her mind around what she saw: exposed needles, dogs walking in and out, a dead body that had been left in the hallway and people casually drinking tea next to severely injured patients.

It was there that she met Anita—a blind, autistic and malnourished 10-year-old girl who could hardly move, as her limbs were just too weak.

“We left that day, and my whole team’s heart was just breaking,” Hill says. “We were thinking—‘*What can we do? What can we fix?*’—instead of just looking for what God was going to show us.”

Feeling drawn to Anita, but unable to speak Spanish, Hill found a way to connect with her: making trumpet noises. “That’s what I did for a month. I made this little girl laugh the same way every day,” Hill says. “She might not ever be able to see my face or know who I am, but she is able to experience joy.”

While the World Race is very much about helping others, it’s also about the racers experiencing brokenness and finding Jesus. God has given her the strength to see into the pain of her past that involved the death of friends and other difficult experiences.

“He’s been showing me where He was when I needed Him,” Hill says. “I’ve been walking in a lot more freedom. Now I can sit with my Father in heaven. He loves me. He’ll keep walking me through. The race has been so good for me. I encourage others to take a leap of faith and apply for the World Race.”

Anyone can apply. Barnes says they’re not looking for great theologians—just those who are willing to follow God on the path He has chosen for them.

While the application isn’t difficult, it’s personal. “It’s incredible to me how broken this generation is,” Barnes says.

Barnes has met countless individuals who have been hurt. “What we’re seeing is a tide of good Christian kids who have been subjected to really difficult things. They just want to get whole,” he says.

Rawness and Reality Television

Those interested in the World Race will be able to watch the journey of Hill's squad on a new reality television show that's in the works by Tim and Maureen Gray of Gray Media.

Maureen Gray, who is directing the show, says they trained the squad in the art of storytelling and gave them equipment to capture even some of the most private moments when the camera crew isn't around.

Viewers will have a chance to see the good and tough aspects of the race, from leading people to the Lord to clashing with team members.

"That messiness matters. God is in that too," Gray says. "I firmly believe that people won't pay attention to your strengths if you don't show them your weaknesses."

Through television and the Internet, the message of the miracles of Jesus can reach more every year. Barnes says every racer can blog so family and friends can keep up with their loved ones.

"We give them an opportunity to die every day and to come into the greatness God has for them as his son or daughter," Barnes says.

For most participants, the race doesn't stop at the end of the 11th month. On the race, "you get to go out and make disciples of God's nations by just being there. (Then) you get to do the same at home," Hill says.

Sarah Breed is a freelance journalist from Central Florida. She and her husband, Josh, have been teaching in Jerusalem for the past year.

Want to know how to pack for the World Race? Julia Robertson gives some helpful advice at .