



Blessed

God's blessings in El Salvador continue! For example, He always provides us with the exact mission team members we need for the work to be done on each trip. On our January trip, we had 27 team members, followed by another 30 on the March trip. These people worked hard and played hard, all the while sharing their love and faith in Jesus with our Salvadoran friends and neighbors. We asked some of them to write about their trip, and we think you'll enjoy their insights on what God is doing there.

A highlight of the January trip was a beginning-of-school assembly for the students and parents. We had our first awards ceremony, with certificates and



medals for those students who did outstanding work during the last school year. The students were excited to be recognized for their accomplishments, and the parents were so proud of their kids. It was a time of praise

and encouragement for these hard-working students, and it also served as an inspiration to those in attendance as their

new school year was about to begin. This school year, because of the generosity of SHIP's donors, 50+ *scholarSHIP* students are being sent to private school and given an opportunity to receive a good education. SHIP's tutors work with students each day after school to help them be successful. These children are the future of El Salvador, and with an education, it is much brighter!

We're not only concerned with the children's education, however. We want the kids and their families to have a relationship with Jesus, which is the primary reason we are in El Salvador. We so appreciate Kerry Beck for coordinating our Bible classes for the kids. In March, the plan of salvation was shared. As a visual reminder of what Christ did for us, the children and many parents made salvation bracelets with colored beads. The black bead represents sin; red for Jesus' blood; white for forgiveness; blue for baptism; green for growth; and gold for heaven. The bracelets are a wonderful reminder of the information that was shared with them during Bible class and His love for each of them.

Our women's work center in El Salvador is often a beehive of activity, as women from the neighborhood purchase clothing and other items to resell to provide for their families. They have purchased so much merchandise from the work center that we recently loaded and shipped a 40-foot container full of

donated goods to replenish their supply. In addition to clothing, sending the container also gives us a chance to send larger donated items, like student desks and filing cabinets, that are needed in our tutoring center and office. We had an energetic team of volunteers show up at the SHIP Resale Shop in Bryan, Texas, to help load the container, and we so appreciated their help – we couldn't have loaded everything within our two-hour window of time without their help!

Do we still build/rebuild homes for the neighbors? Yes, we do! It's an important part of the work we do there, but so much more is going on at the same time. We invite you to join us on a trip this summer! The application and trip details are located on our website (www.shipinternational.org/mission-trips/upcoming-mission-trips).

Summer 2017 Mission Trips

- **May 26-June 2** – Space is still available & deadlines have been extended.
- **June 3-10** – This trip is full; no space is available.
- **June 23-30** – Space is available for **3-4 men** (based on SHIP El Salvador's housing arrangements).

Being a Part of God's Work

by Mara Lang

Chairs are crowded around the chipped linoleum table, people leaning in close to hear the young man talk. He's only a year my senior, yet his mere 19 years have been shaped by a thousand lifetimes of pain. We strain our ears to hear, and try to hide our tears as he shares his story – how his childhood has been cracked, violated, and stolen away from him at a very young age. I weep for the things that he has done, and especially the things that have been done to him. How could the boy who plays soccer, the flirty one, the one who loves the Lord wholeheartedly, have to live with this kind of baggage? But then it hits me the next morning; this is the life we have been called to live.



I think back to this time and remember how we prayed over our brother in Christ, and returned to the Lord with praise. Too often, I get caught up in the monotony of my daily life, callous to the decisions I make and how they affect others. But I look back to that night, as "Roberto" narrated his story with courage and humility, barely holding back tears.

Roberto is but one of many SHIP has touched. He is more than a statistic; he is a friend, a brother. I wholeheartedly believe that the cross not only bridged the gap between God and us, but the gap between others and us as well, so we can know them intimately, as we know the Writer of our lives. SHIP provides a way for us to cross the bridge, to meet other people, break out of our comfort zone, and to find people who are just like us.

I can easily remove myself from the pain of the world by just turning off the TV or throwing the newspaper in the recycling, and continue living my life aloof. Untouched. Apathetic. But

we weren't called to live comfortable lives, were we? With SHIP, the headlines become real people, who laugh, create, love, sing, and weep, just like me. Instead of being removed, SHIP challenges us to break through our comfortable little bubbles and to reach out to those in darkness. Only, I've come to realize, that I need to be shown hope as much as they do. A mission trip with SHIP isn't just a chance to serve others; it's a chance to see God up close and personal. Yes, it is a chance to be a part of God's work, His masterpiece. But it's not just to reach out to those in the darkness of the world but also to help heal the darkness in us.



God's Plans, Not Mine

by Jimmy Friend

Spring break in El Salvador. I'd never have guessed this is what I would be doing, but I'm so glad I did. People from my church in Oklahoma have been going to El Salvador with SHIP for quite some time now. I avoided it, but my daughter, Morgan, kept bringing it up. Finally, on the last day to register, I felt God telling me to go, and I signed up myself and my daughter for the trip. Truthfully, later I was wondering what I had gotten us into, but I put it in God's hands.



Once our passports arrived, I was getting excited about the trip. I began planning in my mind what I was going to accomplish while there. Looking back, I know God was listening and had a good chuckle about my plans. His plans were much different than mine.

We arrived in El Salvador, and I was ready to get started. The SHIP building was so beautiful, and the views were breathtaking. My plan was to meet all

the children at the orphanage and work with the locals on the duplexes that were being built. God had other plans. Little did I know I wouldn't be working with the kids or even the duplexes. God had an assignment for me that would give me time to reflect. God put me and one of my best friends, Ted, in a room by ourselves and told us to put in a drop ceiling. Wait a minute, God! This isn't what I had planned. I decided to not fight it and just do it. Best decision of my life. While we were working to finish this ceiling, not only did I get to put God first and think about how He has blessed my life, I got to understand how He is using SHIP to bless the people on this mountain. When Ann Horton came in one day to see the ceiling and started to tear up, it was then I knew why God put me on this project. My job was to make sure this ceiling was done before I left so that the women could have a cooler place to study God's words. It was completed, and I got to see how God was using all of us to complete His mission. I also got to meet 20 plus other followers of Christ and make some new friends.

God can use you on that mountain in El Salvador, as well. I strongly suggest you take the leap of faith and go to El Salvador. But don't be surprised if your plans change!

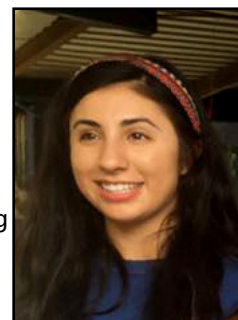
Overcoming Obstacles

by Natalie Alcalá

I'm so thankful that the Lord put it on my heart to go to El Salvador. Naturally, I had a few fears. I feared that knowing little to no Spanish would hinder me from connecting to the people I was there to serve. But boy, was I wrong.

Joy flooded my heart as I played with the kids at the orphanage at night. Hearing the VBS kids excitedly recite their memory verse warmed my heart. Each time one of the kids embraced me with their smiling faces and heartfelt hugs, I didn't want to let go. These simple moments impacted me in ways I could never have imagined.

God really opened my eyes one day as I was outside planning a girls' Bible study that I would be leading later that day. As I sat pondering what God wanted me to say, a woman wandered in my direction. As she approached me, I gave her a welcoming smile and prepared to greet her with the little bit of Spanish I knew. But before I could say anything, she pulled out pictures of her family and





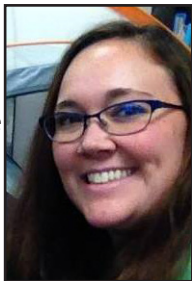
handed them to me. I began asking her questions about the pictures. She told me she didn't speak any English, and I instantly felt a wave of discouragement; the language barrier was hindering my chance to connect. That's when the Lord intervened in a remarkable way. For about 25 minutes, we talked about our families and interests. For the most part, neither of us could truly translate what the other was saying, but somehow we communicated and understood one another. God tore down the wall that prevented us from connecting to one another. I realized that godly love overcomes obstacles, even a language barrier. I even read a several Bible verses aloud to her in English.

What makes moments like these so beautiful is that God never fails to turn something simple into something purposeful and meaningful. Although I went to serve the people of El Salvador, they ended up teaching me life lessons and showing me love and grace in ways that only come from the Lord himself. God showed me that if you trust Him, He will be glorified. Witnessing the simplicity of the Salvadoran lifestyle was humbling. I was changed by this experience and came back to the States with a new perspective on life.

I Want to Know Him More

by Sabrina Decker

I thought I was going on a mission trip to love on kids in an orphanage and build homes; however, I quickly realized I was there to love God and build my own relationship with Him. I thought I was going to help people who were "less fortunate" than myself. After hearing stories from Salvadoran friends and neighbors, I realized I was the one less fortunate. Their faith in God was stronger. Their hunger for God was greater. I wanted to know God like they did. I wanted Him to embrace me like I



saw Him surround the people cramming into a church with no air conditioning, with the sizzle and slapping of pupusas in the background and worship music in front. The congregation sang seamlessly from Spanish to English. Prayer didn't need translation. I could feel it. I could see the prayer in people's faces and feel it in their hands. There were church members walking the aisles going up to people who looked like they needed a prayer, a friend. They didn't wait for someone to ask for it; they gave blessings and reassurance willingly and expectantly.

As I panted up the steep hill to the job site where I would spend hours in the sun digging trenches, I pictured the couples and families who would be carrying groceries, kids, and school books up this incline. How blessed they would feel for the indoor plumbing and enough electricity to run a fridge and a lamp. There'd be no complaining about the sweat and labor it took to get to their house each day, because at least they had a sturdy home and reliable roof. They wouldn't mind the leaves, the dust, or the bugs that surrounded their walkway. Or, the trash that permeated their view. They would carry their work on their heads with pride, grace, and inhuman balancing capabilities.

Spanish. English. Salvadoran. American. Christian. Atheist. Healed. Damaged. Saved. Hurting. I saw that no matter our differences, we all want love. We all want acceptance. In any language, any poverty or wealth level, people have been hurt by people. People in their own homes, people in their communities, people in their church. Yet, we still look to people to love us and save us. It resonated with me that Jesus Christ is the only one who can truly save us; however, it is up to us to show people what being saved looks like, feels like, and ensure that our witness leads others to know Jesus. That no matter what kind of life you have, you are responsible for how you live it. You get to choose how your life affects others. When you have to fight for your faith, when you have to actively protect your faith, it makes you a stronger person. You appreciate it more. You use it more. To the people in our Salvadoran neighborhood, there is no fear or threat that exceeds their desire to know and be known by the Lord. I want to know Him more.

God Is Faithful

by Melissa Pittman

My first trip to El Salvador was in 2015, and I had no expectations of being impacted by the trip. I thought I'd go there, teach kids about Jesus, do some construction work, and come home. Boy, was I wrong. That trip changed my life, and I've never been the same.



I bonded closely with and still keep in touch with one of the older girls in the orphanage, "Valentina." She has taught me so much about Christ's love for us. I'm moved by her love for the Lord despite the trials she has faced. While I'm there, I spend part of my time teaching her English and helping her with school work. She's now attending college and studying to be a social worker. She's also very involved in her church. Because of SHIP, she has opportunities that would have never been available otherwise.

Like many people, I've been through trials in my life. When I'm vulnerable and share about these trials with the Salvadoran girls, they begin to open up about their lives and trials. Often, it shows that although we live in different countries, we are very much the same.

I've gone to El Salvador three times now, and each time the Lord teaches me so much. SHIP has a great influence on its Salvadoran neighborhood – providing opportunities to earn a living, educating children, and most importantly, loving the people. As a result, the neighborhood is open to the Lord and His work. One of the most amazing times is when a family gets a new house or a desperately needed add-on to their current house. They are filled with such gratitude.

The Lord is so faithful on each trip to reveal something I didn't know was in my heart. For example, after this last trip, the Lord put it on my heart to start a non-profit for at-risk teens and women in my area. I never imagined myself doing something like that, but after my trips to El Salvador, I began to see the same issues in my own town.

I'm excited to be a part of SHIP's work and thankful for their heart for the Lord. If you have the opportunity, don't hesitate to join them in their quest to reach the hearts of the Salvadoran people.

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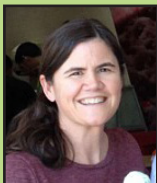
Ceci

No Translation Needed

by Tammy Lang

Love needs no translation.

I'll admit I was a little skeptical of this claim as I was heading to El Salvador for my first mission trip. I couldn't speak the language. How was I going to communicate love to the Salvadoran people? Is a smile and a hug really enough if there aren't any words to go with them? My daughter, who was going with me and who had already been to El Salvador once, insisted I would be fine (although that was easy for her to



say...she spoke Spanish!). You'll find ways to understand each other, she promised.

As we prepared for the evangelistic outreach on Monday, I was tasked with organizing the worship music. While practicing on the keyboard, a young girl from the neighborhood, Ceci, came up to me very excitedly and motioned to the keyboard, asking to play. "Jingle Bells," she said in English. She wanted me to teach her how to play Jingle Bells! As I showed her the notes on the keyboard, she watched intently, then tried to copy what I had done. After a few tries, she got it and was very excited. Learning this simple tune gave her so much joy, which was obvious by the huge smile on her

face, and I was so blessed by being able to teach it to her.

God graciously allowed me that musical connection with Ceci toward the beginning of my trip. I saw that, indeed, love can be spoken with very few words. God can use ordinary moments to bring people together, and He will use those simple things to overcome a language or any other kind of barrier.

After that moment, I didn't worry so much about not knowing Spanish and just enjoyed being with people and serving how I could while I was there. Although I fumbled for the few Spanish words I knew, it didn't matter. Love really doesn't need translation.