

2021 NORTH AMERICAN MISSION STUDY FOR ADULTS

The Mission Moves Forward

“Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord’s work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”
(1 Corinthians 15:58, HCSB)

STUDY OVERVIEW

The theme for the 2021 Week of Prayer for North American Missions is “The Mission Moves Forward.” The focal Scripture verse is 1 Corinthians 15:58. Paul is encouraging the church in Corinth to keep the mission of the gospel moving forward, even when it’s hard. Why? Because through Jesus Christ, they have victory (v. 57). Because Jesus conquered sin and death through His death on the cross and His resurrection. Their efforts are not in vain.

Neither are our efforts, nor the efforts of missionaries all over North America, in vain. Paul instructs us all to be steadfast and immovable in advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ despite hardship. We are in this together.

Our gifts to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® provide the funds for thousands of missionaries as they train and serve across North America where it’s estimated more than 275 million are without Christ.

Through this mission study, adults will learn how important it is to keep moving the mission forward, even when it is difficult. They will learn how important it is to give to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® and to pray for all missionaries in North America. Perhaps some in your group will become actively involved in church planting or in other types of ministry in hard-to-reach populations as they learn about the ministry of Jacob and Francine Zailian in Sanger, California.

Prepare for the study

- For overall promotion of the North American Missions Emphasis to your entire church, order the free North American Missions Emphasis theme poster, Annie Armstrong Easter Offering envelopes and prayer guides from your state WMU office or from the Annie Armstrong website. Ordering information can be found at AnnieArmstrong.com/StateWMU or AnnieArmstrong.com/Resources.
- Featured missionary video segments and additional downloadable promotional resources can also be found on the site for use with your overall church promotion. You can order a DVD if needed with the missionary video segments by calling 1-800-634-2462 or email AAEO@namb.net.
- Download the adult study materials and accompanying video segment at AnnieArmstrong.com/Resources. Make sure you have a way to show the video, “Adult Mission Study: Sanger, California.” It features church planting couple Jacob and Francine Zailian in Sanger, California. **This video is only available on the website to view or download.**
- Order 2021 Week of Prayer prayer guides for each participant, or the guides can be viewed online at AnnieArmstrong.com. Download bookmarks to print from the site or order a supply from NAMB.
- Work with missions leaders and other church leaders to plan aspects of the study, such as scheduling, scope and promotion. Encourage these leaders to enlist other church members to take ownership by helping in the planning and implementation of the study. You may choose to do the study as a special event or incorporate it into an existing meeting or group setting.

- Publicize the study through church bulletins, social media, churchwide announcements, newsletters and so forth.
- Ask small groups and church members to pray for the study outcome. Pray that individuals will be inspired as they learn about missions efforts in North America and will eagerly support those who are serving as missionaries with the North American Mission Board (NAMB).
- Connect with your pastor to receive clear understanding of how your church supports the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions. Be prepared to share that with your class.

Note: For more missionary stories and North American missions news, check out the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering Facebook page at facebook.com/aaeo.sbc.

Lead the Study

Introduction and Opening Activity (10 minutes)

Welcome participants and introduce yourself. Introduce the study using the information in the study overview. Explain what the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering is and how your church participates. Note that all donations to the offering go directly to support missionaries in North America and their ministries.

Ask participants if they have ever been involved in ministry to the homeless, drug addicts or gang members. If some have, ask them to briefly describe some of what might make this type of ministry hard. (Some people don't want to change, think church looks down on them, some return to old lifestyles, some take advantage, often it's hard for the church to know how to help them, etc.)

What might make this type of ministry fruitful and rewarding? (Some are desperate for change, want better for their children, conversions can be dramatic.)

Transition to the lesson.

Lesson and/or Video (20 minutes)

Note: Introduce the study by showing the video, "Adult Mission Study: Sanger, California." Use the lesson material and discussion points below to lead

the study. Be sure to include possible action steps your church can take to move the mission forward by ministering to the people in your community, whatever the demographic, just as Jacob and Francine minister to the people in theirs.

Another option if you don't have a way to show the video, you can teach from this lesson material and discussion points or create your own discussion points to suit your class.

Perhaps you have heard the expression, "Turn your mess into your ministry." We all have a story. Some may seem more dramatically life-changing than others, but each person's story has an impact on the person he or she inevitably becomes. Life stories can shape passions and inspire us to help save the world, even if it's only one person at a time.

Often, we question why God allows bad things in our lives or even allows us to make unwise, life-changing decisions. We may never know the answers to those questions this side of heaven, but we can rest assured that God will not waste one single mess we make and will work it out for good. Sometimes, He really does turn our messes into ministries.

Such is the case in the life of Jacob Zailian. He was a thief, a drug dealer and a drug abuser, which landed him in jail several times. He had several children with his then girlfriend, Francine, who had finally had enough. Francine came to the jail and told Jacob she wanted nothing else to do with him. She and the kids were better off without him.

Left alone, Jacob saw that he was behaving in the same way his father had and was creating the same life for his children that his father had created for him. He went back to his cell and prayed to the God he knew existed and gave his life to Christ. From that moment on, his life changed dramatically.

After he was released from jail, he began attending church at the Salvation Army and working to reconcile with Francine. God began putting people in his life who invested in him and disciplined him.

God worked miracle after miracle in Jacob's life. He and Francine got married and started Set Free Church for the homeless, the drug addicts and the gang members in Sanger—people Jacob says, "would scare many average churchgoers."

The Sanger community is economically depressed with a high rate of poverty, homelessness and

addiction. Most who attend Jacob's church have known that life and they know Jacob because he was once one of them. Some might never darken the doorway of a traditional church, but they come to listen to Jacob because he understands them, and they see the miracle God worked in his life.

He is a self-described "100-mile-an-hour" kind of guy who injects excitement and enthusiasm into everything he does for the sake of moving the mission forward. The people in his community recognize his sincerity and that he truly cares for them.

Set Free Church currently rents space in a local church building and holds services on Sunday evenings with a big dinner after every worship service where all are welcome, not just church members. On three additional days of the week, the church prepares free meals and invite those in the community to either come and eat or come and serve. Because the church has a partnership with a store in Fresno and some community organizations, they are able to feed 350–400 people per week and address other physical needs.

Feeding ministry is a primary tool for Jacob. The goal is to meet a basic need while building relationships with the disadvantaged in the community so he can introduce them to Christ and help them leave their old life behind.

The team always asks if they can pray for those who come for food. That often opens doors to hear their stories and needs. The team then prays with them immediately and invites them to attend worship and the next Sunday dinner.

Because the coronavirus pandemic created restrictions on group sizes, Jacob learned to be creative in doing whatever it takes to move the mission forward. He didn't have access to state-of-the-art video equipment, so he worked with what he had—even if it meant taping his cell phone to a stand so he could broadcast online. He adapted his worship services to maintain social distancing recommendations. And, he and Francine saw how God used the time of uncertainty by bringing more people to Jesus.

Set Free Ministry also takes to the streets, inviting the homeless and the drug dealers to come and learn. They do indeed come because they know and trust Jacob. Over and over again, lives have been

changed as those without hope come to faith, are baptized and disciplined. And, the church is growing.

Crystal meth and heroin are a real problem in the community. Jacob is committed to helping those who want out of their addiction connect with a Christ-centered rehab. To help them get clean, he sends addicts to the Lake Elsinore Set Free Ranch for recovery, and when they graduate, he welcomes them to Set Free Church's discipleship house to help them continue their new life with love, care and intense discipleship.

Our gifts to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering support Jacob and Francine and their Set Free ministry. Jacob looks at every gift as God's provision, and he uses it all to help the people in Sanger without hope obtain the freedom that is only found in Christ. Jacob and Francine are "steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work" because they know their "labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15: 58). Neither is our work in vain.

Discussion:

1. Jacob made the remark that Set Free Church focuses on people who would scare many average churchgoers. On the flip side of that, consider that those same people might be uncomfortable around the average churchgoer. Speaking honestly, discuss the fear factors from both perspectives. Why would either group fear the other?
2. What can be done to squash the fear and obtain unity in Christ between the two groups?
3. Consider the demographics of the community surrounding your church. What are the needs of the people and families?
4. How can your church get out of the four walls of the church building and into the community to meet needs and bring the lost to Christ? Would a feeding ministry work well in bringing the lost to Christ in the area surrounding your church? If not, discuss partnering with the Zailians and Set Free Church in Sanger to support their ministry or a similar local ministry in your area. Encourage group members to donate their time, not just money, to meet and touch the needy in a personal way realizing that while they need food, they most need to know that someone genuinely cares.

- Perhaps your church has suffered, too, because of the coronavirus pandemic. Members may feel defeated and that they just cannot help someone else. Talk about helping even one person or family at a time by meeting physical needs and welcoming them into your church. Name some individuals or families and determine to follow through. We have God's promise that our labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Close (5 minutes)

One thing we can all do is give to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. This offering helps to fund missionaries, like Jacob and Francine, all over North America. Most are ministering to hard-to-reach people in hard-to-reach places to see lives miraculously changed as people discover a new life in Christ. That's something worth supporting.

We can also pray for these missionaries. Distribute the prayer guides and bookmarks you downloaded or ordered from AnnieArmstrong.com/Resources.

Using the prayer guide, verbally review the ministries and prayer needs of each of the missionaries featured during the Week of Prayer for North American Missions.

Note that every dollar given to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering goes directly to resourcing the mission and ministry of these missionaries and thousands more across North America. We emphasize the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering during the Easter season, but donations are accepted year-round at the North American Mission Board

Encourage participants to make it a family goal to set aside a designated sum of money year-round. Decorate a jar or box in which to put the funds and celebrate as God blesses and multiplies the amount.

Ask for volunteers to pray aloud for the needs of a specific missionary listed in the prayer guide. Encourage participants to use the bookmarks as reminders to pray for these and all missionaries in North America throughout the year. The future of North America rests in the power of prayer.

Dismiss the class.