

Real Treasure

COSTA RICA | September 14

Jahiquel



Jahiquel was a poor boy living in a poor family in Costa Rica. Growing up, he didn't have much of anything. But when he was 16, he started wearing a thick gold chain around his neck and gold rings on his fingers.

The neighborhood gang got suspicious. The gang leader, nicknamed "The Devil," thought Jahiquel might be dealing drugs without his consent. He instructed a gang member to contact Jahiquel via social media and ask, "Is your chain made of real gold?"

Jahiquel was proud that he owned real gold jewelry, and he sent a one-word reply, "Yes." He knew that the message had come from a gang member. He had once belonged to the gang, but he had left it to join a different gang. Now, instead of selling drugs, he was robbing homes and kidnapping people for ransom. He had bought his gold jewelry with ill-gotten gains from the gang.

Several hours later, at 7 o'clock that evening, Jahiquel saw the gang member speeding toward him on a motorcycle. Jahiquel was standing outside his grandmother's house, where he had just arrived to spend the night. He had walked over from his mother's house, where he

stayed during the day.

Sitting behind the gang member on the motorcycle was the gang member's brother. With horror, Jahiquel saw the brother raise a 9mm handgun and begin firing. He recognized the gun. He had sold it to the brother several months earlier.

In rapid succession, eight bullets pierced Jahiquel's body: two in his legs and five in his chest and stomach. He fell to the ground, terrified. He was too scared to scream or move. Thoughts filled his mind. He remembered, as a boy, being taught by a Seventh-day Adventist aunt to pray and read the Bible. He realized that he had made a mistake by participating in gangs. He prayed, "God, forgive me."

Time seemed to stand still. Then he heard the motorcycle race away. A car passed by but didn't stop. Grandmother came out of the house and bent down over Jahiquel.

A second car came by and stopped. Two people got out, placed Jahiquel inside, and took him to the hospital.

Jahiquel woke up the next day at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. He was hooked up to a machine that helped him breathe. He had 23



stitches down the middle of his stomach. He learned that he had nearly died. Adventists from his aunt's church had been praying for his survival for hours. Now he was alive, and it was a miracle.

From that day, he decided to live for Jesus.

Three years later, Jahiquel is studying to become a barber. He shares his story with other young people, encouraging them to find meaning in life through God and not gangs. He urges them to fill their minds with good things and to stay close to God.

In his own life, he regrets filling his mind with garbage as a teen, and he trusts that God will fill it with good things as he spends time with the Bible. After all, the apostle Paul said, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2, NKJV).

"I want to think about good things, and I don't want to remember the past," Jahiquel said. "Now I read the Bible every morning and every night. I wake up early to pray. It's a process. I know that with God's help, I can go far."

The two brothers who attacked him were never brought to justice because he didn't reveal their identities to the police. He still lives in the same neighborhood, and he understands that turning them in would endanger him, his mother, and his grandmother.

As for his gold jewelry, he lost it all on the day of the attack. He doesn't know who took it, but he doesn't mind. He has found that real treasure can't be worn. Real treasure is who he has in his heart. 🌍

This mission story provides an inside look at life in Costa Rica and missional challenges there. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open a center of influence to share the love of Jesus with children who, like Jahiquel, are at risk of being influenced by drugs and gangs in Costa Rica. Thank you for planning a generous

Story Tips

- Show Costa Rica on the map.
- Pronounce Jahiquel as JAY-kel.
- Watch a short YouTube video of Jahiquel: bit.ly/Jahiquel-IAD.
- Download photos for this story from Facebook: bit.ly/fb-mq.
- Share Mission Posts and Fast Facts from the Inter-American Division: bit.ly/iad-2024.
- Know that the Thirteenth Sabbath project to open a center of influence for troubled children in Costa Rica seeks to fulfill the following objectives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: Spiritual Growth Objective No. 6, "To increase accession, retention, reclamation, and participation of children, youth, and young adults," and Spiritual Growth Objective No. 7, "To help youth and young adults place God first and exemplify a biblical worldview." For more information, go to the website: IWillGo2020.org.

Mission Post

- Frank and Cora Hutchins were the first Adventist workers on the coast of the Central American Caribbean in the late 19th and early 20th century. Frank worked as a dentist, colporteur, and pastor. At that time, the most effective means of transportation through the region was by boat. Frank rented a boat for his trips around the Central American countries until he was able to buy a missionary schooner, which was named the Herald.
- An estimated 52 percent of Costa Ricans are Catholic, 25 percent are Protestant, 17 percent are of no religion, and 6 percent are "other."

offering on September 28.

By Andrew McChesney