

QUIETING THE GROWL

Brian Brewer follows God's call from environmental science to the mission field

In the Eastern Himalayan Mountains, it is only ten miles from a village with water to one without. On foot, the hike seems longer. Carrying supplies in by pack mule, Brian Brewer and the locals who help him are greeted by native residents who are anxious to take part in the building of their community. Yet what starts as an intent to help, quickly becomes sitting, watching, and waiting; observing the pride and curious refusal of help, as the indigenous men build a dam and makeshift sewage system. No longer will the water they bathe in be the water their children drink from. And with ownership they can say, "this is the dam we built." No longer will they say, "this is the dam the Americans built."

Preparing for the Journey

Sitting across from me in Java City, Brian Brewer appears an unlikely scholar. His quiet demeanor and baseball cap disguise the three degrees he has earned from Hardin-Simmons University. Even more intriguing is the fact that the bible/chemistry double major and adjunct professor, who also earned a Master of Divinity as well as a Master of Science in Environmental Management, is the youth minister at Anson Baptist Church.

As he prepares to leave the country for at least two years, possibly indefinitely, Brian must say goodbye to the students he has mentored and watched mature. His last few days before leaving Texas for training are spent not only packing, but also transitioning and trying to set up a summer mission trip for his youth group once he is gone. The small church, which averages 225 on Sunday mornings, is about to get even smaller.

From Environmental Management to Missions

The jump from environmental management to missions came through a not-so-far-fetched medium: Logsdon School of Theology. As Brian explained, in the seminary you are allowed to choose one non-Logsdon or university-wide elective. For his one class outside of the Logsdon walls, Brian chose an environmental management course with Dr. Ouimette, which sparked an interest in the program. When asked about favorite aspect of the curriculum Brian replied, "I appreciate the practicality of it—the hands-on nature of the program. It features more of a common sense type approach, rather than a 'save the world' or 'go green' stance."

Brian recalls the “Pecos River Course” as one of his fondest memories in the program. The course features reading and meetings to prepare and culminates with a three day trip on the Pecos.

“We started at the head of the river in New Mexico and followed the river down, running samples on the water as we went,” said Brian. “In addition to learning a lot about West Texas history, it gave us a chance to really focus on pollution issues. To focus on looking at results and trying to figure out the why and how and what we could do to fix this.”

The small program allows the department to tailor the schedule according to students’ needs. In Brian’s case, this included doing an internship, which would build the foundation for his current mission work. His first trip to the region came after his first year in the seminary and was spent mainly doing mission work and college ministry. But his second trip, under the guise of the environmental management internship, allowed him to foster relationships with local people who also feel compelled to share the gospel. Living on his own with no translator gave Brian a new appreciation for those with language barriers. “I gained a lot of patience for people in America learning English,” he said.

His work is illegal and dangerous; if discovered, Brian could face deportation, which to someone who has dedicated their life to building relationships and sharing the message of Christ in the area, would be devastating. The locals who assist him however, face even graver punishment.

Having already considered a career in missions, receiving a degree in environmental management was more than just an opportunity to further his education. It was a way in.

“Having a degree provides a lot of credibility, especially to a foreign government. The places where I’m going, it would be a lot more difficult to gain access to the area if you didn’t have a set of skills to offer,” he said. “To put it plainly, it gives me a secret purpose.”

In an undisclosed country not open to missions, it is still possible to gain access under the platform of humanitarian work. In a village where agriculture is one of the main sources of income, the premise of speaking with farmers about agricultural issues, planting techniques, and sanitation problems is both believable and welcomed.

Because of the terrain of the Eastern Himalayan Mountains, it is hard to reach many of the small villages located deep within the hills. In the area near where Brian will be, the International Mission Board has been aware of one particular unreached people group for a few years now. From an American standpoint, it is difficult to imagine asking someone if they have ever heard about a man named Jesus and hearing the word no in return. But for Brian and his team, the response is all too familiar.

Listening to the Call

For almost four years, Brian has called the Anson Baptist Church parsonage home. But he hasn't always lived a mile and a half away from the famous Anson lights. Born and raised in Fort Worth, Brian attended Springdale Baptist Church throughout high school. While attending a summer camp at HSU between his junior and senior year of high school, he gained an interest in the university and ultimately decided to request more information. Though his peers stayed close to home and attended local schools, he found himself wanting to branch out and get away from the fast-paced metroplex. Studying as a bible minor and then major, Brian liked learning the history behind the stories he had learned about in Sunday school. What started as an interest, ultimately led to a calling.

Following the Master's Example

Brian's goal is to use his natural talent for environmental science to open doors and hearts. "Just as Jesus often healed on more than one level when performing miracles, it is my personal goal to help not just their spiritual needs, but also their physical needs," Brian explains. "These people can't hear the gospel over the growl of their stomachs."