



## GREETINGS FROM VENEZUELA

I know that prayer letters are supposed to be upbeat. I wish today I was upbeat, but in reality I am sad. In just two days we will say goodbye to a family we have been discipling for two years. They have become more than just "a" family to us, they have become OUR family. I can't tell you the countless hours we have disciplined over the last few years. I cannot tell you the amount of times I have received texts asking me where such and such a verse is found. I can't tell you how many times we have enjoyed the giggles of their children as our kids played with theirs. I cannot tell you how many tears we have shed over the last few days knowing that our time of discipleship with this family has ended. I am not so over confident to think that I am the only person that they can learn from. I realize that God had them study with us for a time and now there are other lessons of sanctification they must learn from other people and other places, but it certainly does not make it easy. When you truly disciple someone it is hours upon hours of life on life and you begin to know that person on such a deeper level.



This is a pattern that has repeated itself since our arrival in 2015. I would challenge any mission strategist to know how to plant churches here in Venezuela because over a years time you can quite possibly see a 100% turnover in your congregation. When we first arrived it was mostly single people looking for better opportunities. Now it is single moms with kids and whole families leaving and they are leaving in droves. We have another mother and child leaving next week for Columbia. It is a single parent home and we have come to love the little boy as we have tried to help the mom with biblical discipline. Next week we say goodbye to them. As I was taking people home in my car yesterday (a process that takes about 2 hours often times because of the lack of public transportation) another recently married man said that they are in the process of preparing to leave as well because the situation is simply unsustainable.



Not gonna lie, there have been lots of tears shed in my house over the past few days and weeks. Just like physical births, spiritual births are exciting especially when you see people grow in their faith by leaps and bounds. But, when they leave and move on and you have spent so much time with them and you know you may never see them again, it is a very saddening experience.

What does excite me is knowing deep down the spiritual depth of this family and knowing that no matter where God leads them there will be spiritual fruit. As far as I am concerned this is more than just a goodbye, it is a commissioning. A commissioning to a new service and life. This family has quietly suffered without telling anyone. Recently eating only moldy bread for 2 weeks and they did it quietly because we never knew until I interviewed them the other day. A few years ago they lost a daughter to cancer, and their son was born extremely premature. All things that God used to bring them to a saving knowledge of him. Please pray for Javier, Enmilder, Helena, and Rafael. Pray with us. If you can, cry with us. Pray that God gives them grace in their journey. Pray that God gives grace as we continue the work here. Pray for the nightmare of conditions here to soon change. Death and hunger have become the new norms, but as you know those types of things never are "normal". Thanks for letting us cry a little. Pray for continued discipleship with other families this year. God bless and Happy New Year.

### Please Prayerfully Remember:

- Starting our visa work again.
- The Family Rojas as they travel!!

*The Sykes*

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