

# Rebuilding in American Samoa

Story by Debra Smith  
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Tsunami victim Jesse Tupa'i, right, whose home was destroyed, is hugged by Vita Sagiao, CC Costa Mesa.

The rain poured down mercilessly. The exhausted Californians, disheveled from the strenuous cleanup in the tropical heat and monsoon rains, began to shake hands with the American Samoan men they had spent the day helping. As they said their good-byes, the property owner, Jesse, suddenly requested, "Will you come back tomorrow?"



Morgan McIntosh salvages an electrical box that was used to restore temporary electrical power in Amanave. A senior at CC Costa Mesa High and one of the wrestling team captains, Morgan was given time off from school to accompany the team.

The invitation surprised the team from America. That morning, when the team of eight from Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa (CCCM), CA, had first approached the devastated home, they had been received unenthusiastically. "When we walked up and offered to help, the men working eyed us suspiciously," said team leader Tim Wylie. "But we whipped out our portable

tools, started cutting rebar, and began moving debris—everybody was sweating, we on one side of the yard and they on the other—and two hours later we were all side by side, handing debris off to each other. By the day's end, they were looking at us like, 'You guys are all right. You're working in the rain, getting cut and scraped up just like we are.' We had become friends."

In September 2009, an enormous undersea earthquake resulted in a tsunami on the South Pacific islands of Samoa, American Samoa, and Tonga. Several villages were devastated. Tim, who directs Parakletos International, a CCCM ministry, immediately began forming a team to go serve.

"Parakletos is a Greek word that means to come alongside," explained Tim. Parakletos comes alongside those in need, particularly after disasters. "We desire to demonstrate Christ's love through acts of service," said Tim. "Standing with people through tragedy, working side by side with them—this is doing unto others as we would have them do unto us. We've found that being with people in the midst of disaster opens up incredible opportunities to share Christ."

Tim continued, "I believe with all my heart that the body of Christ, the people, are the ministering arm of the church. It's not the pastor's job to go out and save the world; it's his job to equip those who sit under him to do ministry. We are the body, the ministers."

*And He Himself gave some to be ... pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry.* Ephesians 4:11-12a

The team followed the advice of locals to discern where help was needed most. Oscar Sagiao, pastor of the Calvary Chapel on American Samoa, led the team to Amanave—property owner Jesse Tupa'i's small village. Upon arrival, Oscar introduced them to the mayor who directed them to Jesse's house. Jesse and his wife, two young sons, and parents were sleeping in tents while they cleared the property to begin rebuilding.

The men returned to Amanave and continued to clear away the wreckage for several days. Tim recalled that "on the third day, Jesse said, 'I've really taken a liking to you—I'm going to miss you guys.' We went from receiving formal Samoan handshakes to hugs as we left each evening."

On one of the team's last days, Jesse's family cooked them a traditional Samoan barbecue. "We gave our tools to Jesse, telling him to use them for his family and for the rest of the village," said Tim. "He was fighting tears, and his family started crying. Jacob and Randy shared the Gospel with him, and Jesse asked Jesus into his life."

*Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.* 2 Corinthians 5:20



The team starts their workday with prayer in the village of Amanave. Parakletos, a ministry of CC Costa Mesa, comes alongside of those in need, often after disasters.



Parakletos team members take a break to share a traditional Samoan barbecue that the Tupa'i family prepared as a gesture of thanks for the team's assistance.

"We are Christ's ambassadors," said Tim. "When you serve, spending a grueling week in the mud working alongside those in need, they see love in action. They cannot argue with what you've done, but they won't know why you've done it. In that context, it's a lot easier to share the Gospel."

When the team flew out, Jesse's family drove across the island to see them off—an activity normally reserved for family. Now, team members occasionally talk on the phone with Jesse and his family. They are praying for opportunities to return and serve in the rebuilding still needed on the islands. Parakletos is applying with the Federal Emergency Management Agency for subsidized airfare, and they hope this may allow them to return with teams in the near future. ↩



Dave Bird, left, and Joe Heaton position a makeshift ladder they found to repair a roof in the village.

*The Parakletos team has been working and serving in ministry to Haiti.*

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