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## **Mission Work in New Zealand and the South Pacific**

### **Chris and Melinda Miller**

Chris and Melinda Miller have devoted their lives to sharing the gospel in New Zealand and throughout the islands of the South Pacific, a region that presents a very different kind of mission field from many others we support. Based in Tauranga, New Zealand, Chris works as a preacher, teacher, and mentor among congregations that are often small, widely scattered, and facing the quiet but persistent challenges of a modern, secular culture. Their work is not only about reaching new souls, but also about strengthening existing churches so they can endure and grow for generations to come.

New Zealand is a beautiful and prosperous country, known for its high quality of life, strong education system, and stable government. There is complete religious freedom, and churches are able to meet and worship openly without fear of persecution. Yet, in many ways, this very environment creates one of the greatest challenges to the gospel. Over the past several decades, New Zealand has become increasingly secular, with a growing number of people identifying as having no religious affiliation. Christianity, once a strong cultural influence, is now often viewed as simply one option among many, or as something belonging to the past. As a result, evangelism requires patience, personal relationships, and a willingness to engage people who may have little prior understanding of Scripture or interest in spiritual matters.

Chris often emphasizes in his reports the importance of not only bringing people to Christ, but also ensuring that the faith is passed from one generation to the next. He has compared the church to a family endeavor that must be intentionally continued, noting that without deliberate teaching and involvement, congregations can struggle to survive beyond a single generation. This reality is evident in New Zealand, where some congregations have diminished over time, while others remain strong because of committed leadership and active discipleship. Much of Chris's work focuses on encouraging and equipping members to take ownership of their faith, to teach their children, and to remain active in sharing the gospel within their communities.

The geography of the region adds another layer of complexity to the work. Chris regularly works with congregations spread across both main islands of New Zealand, traveling to encourage and strengthen churches that may be separated by many hours of distance. Beyond New Zealand, his efforts extend thousands of miles across the South Pacific, where he visits and supports Christians living on scattered island nations. These congregations are often small and isolated, separated not only by geography but by vast stretches of ocean. Reaching them requires long flights, careful planning, and a willingness to invest significant time simply to be present. Yet these visits provide vital encouragement, teaching, and connection to the broader body of Christ.

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In recent years, Chris has also been able to extend his reach in new ways through the use of modern technology. By communicating through tools such as WhatsApp, Messenger, and FaceTime, he is able to stay in regular contact with brethren across the South Island, throughout New Zealand, and even into other parts of the South Pacific and beyond. While travel remains an important part of the work, these tools have reduced the need for constant long-distance trips and have allowed Chris to be more consistently available. This has proven especially valuable in mentoring, as he is able to provide guidance, teaching, and encouragement more frequently, even from afar. In this way, the work continues not only across great distances, but with a steady and ongoing presence that strengthens relationships and supports spiritual growth.

Socially and economically, the people of New Zealand generally enjoy stability and comfort. While this is a blessing, it can also lead to a sense of self-sufficiency that makes spiritual dependence on God seem less urgent. Busy lifestyles and competing priorities often leave little time for spiritual reflection or commitment. At the same time, the culture values authenticity and relationships, which creates opportunities for meaningful conversations and personal connections through which the gospel can be shared. Chris and Melinda's approach reflects this reality, focusing on building relationships, teaching consistently, and demonstrating a lived faith that others can see and trust.

Another important aspect of the work is leadership development. In earlier years, many congregations in the region relied heavily on outside support, but today there is a growing need for local leadership that can guide and sustain the church. Chris spends significant time mentoring men who can serve as teachers, preachers, and leaders within their own congregations. This kind of work does not always produce immediate visible results, but it is essential for the long-term health and independence of the church.

In his reports, Chris has occasionally drawn on the natural features of New Zealand to describe the spiritual environment. The country is known for its geothermal activity, with heat and energy lying just beneath the surface. In a similar way, there is often a quiet spiritual openness among the people, even when it is not immediately visible. With patience, teaching, and genuine care, that hidden openness can be reached, and faith can grow.

The work in New Zealand and the surrounding islands reminds us that mission efforts are not always defined by rapid growth or dramatic change. Often, they are characterized by steady, faithful labor—teaching, encouraging, and building relationships over time. Chris and Melinda Miller continue to serve with this long-term vision, helping congregations remain strong, helping individuals grow in their faith, and

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ensuring that the message of Christ continues to be known across great distances in a part of the world where it might otherwise fade.

Through the support of the NorthWest Church of Christ, this work continues. Though separated by great distance, we share in their efforts, their challenges, and their joys. Their example encourages us to remain faithful in our own service, remembering that the spread of the gospel depends not only on where we are, but on our willingness to teach, to encourage, and to live out our faith wherever God has placed us.