

# BRIGHTER THAN ORION

The Micah Project Spring 2021 Newsletter

“Doesn’t it feel like the darkness is closing in?” a friend of mine commented the other day as we were discussing recent world events. “It’s such a dark period of history we’re living in,” she added. It took me a few days to know how to respond. Of course, I see a lot of suffering on a daily basis in our ministry to the street-connected youth of Tegucigalpa. Even before anyone heard of COVID-19, Honduras was teetering on the brink of failed-state status -- so it isn’t hard to imagine the devastating impact of the past year.

Reflecting over these past twelve months, however, my heart’s focus is not the fear and sadness that dominate the news. Quite the opposite: at the Micah Project we have seen God’s light shine in so many ways, and the first thing that comes to my mind is gratitude. If anything, the deepening darkness of these times has helped us to see God’s light shine brighter than ever.

If I were to try to tell all of the ways that God’s light has been breaking through here at Micah these last few months, this letter would quickly turn into an entire book. Here are four short stories of four young lives being transformed by the brilliant light of God’s love. May these examples encourage you that even in the darkest of times, His light always overcomes the world.

## ISMAEL: THE CHEF’S APPRENTICE

Twenty-year-old Ismael has been a part of the Micah family since 2013, but the chains of alcoholism that have kept his biological family bound to street life always seemed to pull him back into the pit as well. While sinking into addiction and despair this past year, Ismael got mixed up with some violent people and his life was being actively threatened. Things seemed pretty hopeless.

Hopeless, that is, until Arle (pronounced AR-lee) intervened. Though a few years older, Arle’s background is so similar to Ismael’s: an alcoholic mom, lots of hopes and dreams created by his time living at Micah, subsequently shattered by his own descent into alcoholism. But Arle fought his way out, and, after a stint in rehab, we helped him go to culinary school in El Salvador. He spent 2019 as a chef on a cruise ship in the Mediterranean, and then when the pandemic shut down that industry, he returned to Honduras and took over Micah’s kitchen. Along the way, he recruited three fellow Micah grads whose plans had also been temporarily scuttled by the pandemic to be his “kitchen acolytes.”

In deep trouble, Ismael appeared at Micah’s front gate several months ago. Arle met him, sat him down, and said, “Man, if you get killed, it’s your own damn fault. Micah’s given you a million chances, just like they gave me. If you really want my help, I’m all in. But if you’re just here for food or money, I don’t have time for that.” Arle’s tough love was exactly what Ismael needed. Taking the next day off, Arle drove Ismael four hours away to a lock-down rehab program. For several months, Arle used his Saturdays to make that long trip into the mountains to visit Ismael.

Today, you will find Ismael chopping onions and grating cheese along with Arle’s other assistants. Like all good chefs, Arle operates his kitchen with military precision, although he also adds a generous dollop of joy. You don’t need a GPS to find our kitchen. Just follow the raucous laughter and the delicious aromas. After his shift ended the other day, Ismael said to me, “I don’t know how to thank Arle for saving my life.”

“I know what you can do for now, Ismael. Keep chopping those onions and continue to point your life toward God’s light.”





## DAVID: THE GIANT SLAYER

When a new kid comes into the Micah House, we never know what he's going to bring with him. Often, he carries a backpack filled with trauma and nightmarish memories. He lives his first months at the Micah House in survival mode: ready for fight or flight at the slightest provocation. Even though we expect this, these months are hard as the Micah family tries to help the boy feel safe enough to move forward.

Every once in a while, though, a kid leaves the streets behind and doesn't look back. David is one of those kids. He was twelve when he joined us last year, but he looked eight or nine. He lived most of his young life on the streets; when he was still in diapers, his mom would take him to the downtown plazas to spend all day begging. Once he was (barely) old enough to share in those duties, she made him beg on his own and required that he bring her his daily earnings. Other adults in the downtown area also began to force David more deeply into the underworld; among other things, the gang that controls the streets made him run small quantities of drugs throughout the city blocks, relying on his small size and innocent face to avoid detection. He needed to escape the streets before it was too late.

Last week, I saw David surrounded by a handful of older Micah guys, all twice his size. Whatever story he was telling had them doubled over with laughter. One of them picked him up, hugged him, and swung him onto his shoulders. "Este cipote tiene chispa"—this kid has a spark!

Like the joy in Arle's kitchen, David's spark is contagious. A few days ago, I found him surrounded by what looked like a bike store hit by a tornado. "Que haces, David? What're you doing?" I asked. "Fixing my bike," he replied, without looking up from the piles of bike parts scattered around him. I'm not sure why fixing his bike required him to strip every part off the frame, but I decided to roll with it. A bit later, I noticed that he had recruited several of the younger Micah guys to help him with the task. Sure enough, in no time he had completely rebuilt his blue BMX and had it spit-shined and ready to ride. The kid may be small, but he handles a socket wrench like a pro!

You can already see that this will be David's approach to life. Even when pieces are scattered everywhere, he will figure out a way to put them back together better than before. Micah is giving him the tools to do just that!







## **GUSTAVO: THE BUILDER**

Last Sunday, I stopped downtown after church to give a container of fried rice to a group of street kids. As soon as they approached my car, they all asked the same question: “Michael, we heard that Micah is going to give us jobs. When does that start?” The news had spread like wildfire on the Tegucigalpa streets that the Micah Project was starting a program called Micah Works to respond in a faithful way to the wrecked Honduran economy.

“Yep. In May, we’re opening a water purification business at Micah,” I told the kids who gathered around as I handed out plates of rice. “You would help us purify the water, bottle it in five-gallon jugs, and sell it to our neighbors. But it’s also a job training program; we would teach you the skills to get and to keep a job in the future, or to create and run your own small business.”

“¡Apúntame!” —the street kids shouted. “Sign me up!” The water purification business is our initial pilot program for Micah Works; in the next few years, we want to start several small businesses to help train street-connected youth to acquire the job skills they need to get off the streets.

Gustavo is our Micah Works’ guinea pig. At nineteen, he’s never made it through a school year and has lived on the streets most of his life. Last November, we accompanied Gustavo and most of the downtown street population to a cemetery where we buried a street youth who fell victim to the increasing violence. While we gathered around the grave, Gustavo approached me. “Michael, give me another chance. I don’t want to die in the streets. Last week, a gang-banger shot me in the foot, and his gang has threatened to do worse!”

Shortly thereafter, we brought Gustavo into our Isaiah House. He studies in our technical school every morning and works on our grounds every afternoon, which he will do until we launch Micah Works. Already, Gustavo is finding a sense of purpose in his work. One hot afternoon, he dragged me out of my office to show me a new bike path that he’s creating for our boys. Sweating profusely but filled with pride, he said, “Look how far I got today!”

“Wow, Gustavo. That’s amazing! I’m so proud of you!” Gustavo’s eyes lit up. When had anyone ever been proud of him? In that moment, Gustavo left the streets even farther behind to embrace a life of new possibilities.



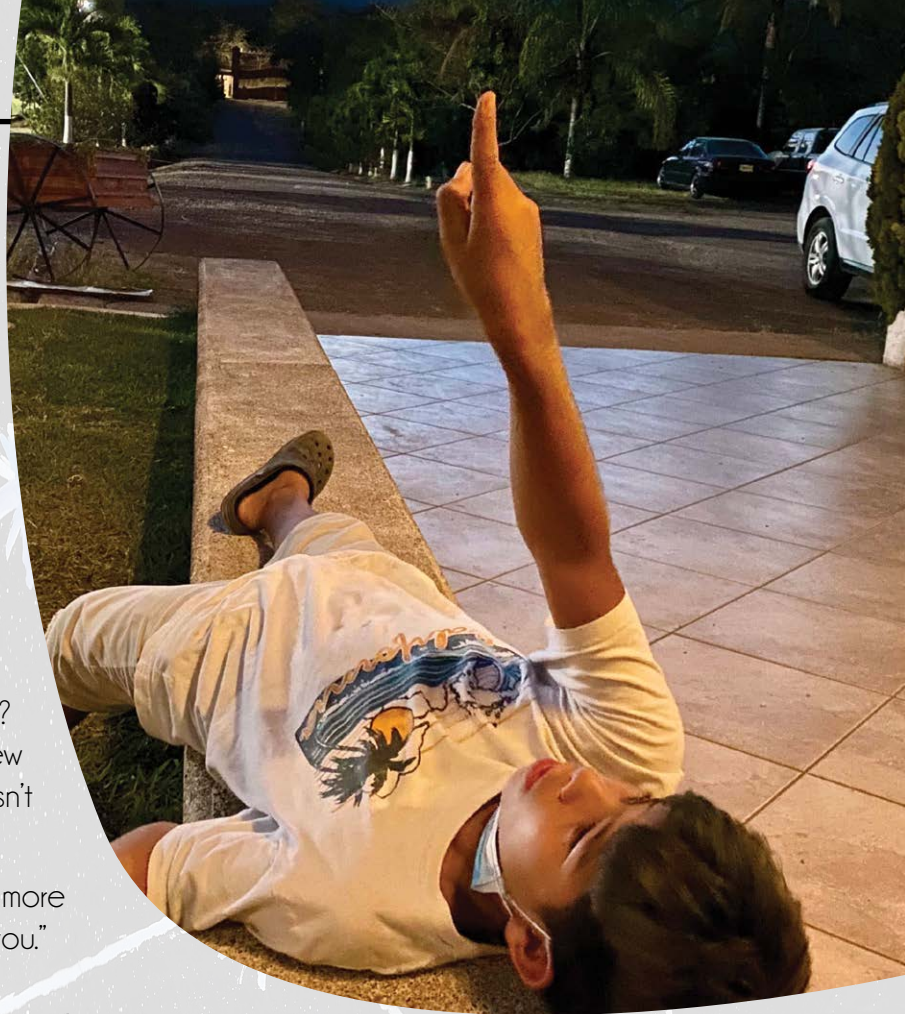
## OLIVER: THE STAR-GAZER

Last year, I wrote about Oliver and the brokenness of his time on the streets ([micahprojecthonduras.org/resources/newsletters.html](http://micahprojecthonduras.org/resources/newsletters.html)). As he takes baby steps toward healing, we see a depth to him that is rare for his age.

The other day Oliver said, "Michael, guess what I do every night before bed now?" I was hoping he would say "I brush my teeth"—another task that 12-year-old ex-street kids aren't very good at. But his answer surprised me: "I go outside and watch Orion cross through the night sky."

"Orion? That's my favorite constellation!" I replied. "Did you know that Orion is mentioned in the Bible? All the way back in the book of Job!" Silent for a few beats, Oliver said, "God's creation really is beautiful, isn't it, Michael?"

"Yes, Oliver, yes, it is. And you know what is even more beautiful than Orion? That big, soft heart He's given you."



## CHILDREN OF THE LIGHT

Ismael, David, Gustavo, and Oliver's stories don't deny that times are filled with hardships. We know that the world is undergoing a difficult period. 1 Peter 4:12 says, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you." But God will never abandon us as we navigate a world in decay. The Apostle Paul reminds us in another letter that we "are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness" (1Thessalonians 5:5).

As Oliver looked up to the heavens, the stars of Orion's belt reflected in his eyes, I told him, "Oliver, you too are a child of the light, and thanks to your Heavenly Father's love, you shine even brighter than Orion."

May that be your sure knowledge too—that He shines in you as you shine for Him.

Your brother in God's light,  
**MICHAEL MILLER**

\*Orion artwork by Micah grad Julio Ortiz

We see God's light shine brightly through you as you pour out love, prayers and financial support on the Micah Project and all of the ones that He has placed in our care. Thank you for your continued presence in all of our lives!

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