



## April Hatten

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I've had some big dreams in life. After college I knew where I wanted to go; what I wanted next. But God had other plans for me. After earning my bachelor's degree from a small university in North Carolina, my plan was to continue my education and pursue a career in the medical field. I wanted to be a doctor.

But while on a mission trip to El Salvador, God started changing my plans. As I saw the spiritual neediness of those who had never heard the gospel, I realized God was calling me to invest my gifts in an area other than medicine. I took a year off and taught in a high school located in a high-poverty area. It was there that God changed my desires from healing people medically, to healing them spiritually.

I met representatives from Columbia International University at a Christian conference, and they introduced me to the heart of the school. I decided to enroll, and it was at CIU that God put within me a longing to see His truth shared with "the least of these." Through my classes and the guidance of my professors, I began to realize the impact I could have in the lives of young people, as I share with them the lasting transformation found in the eternal truth of God's Word.

That led me to the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) where I disciple and mentor incarcerated youth. It's a joy to watch God's redemptive work become a reality in their daily experiences. Two success stories come to mind as I consider the youth at DJJ. One young man, after being released, obtained his high school diploma and is attending college. Another male is beating the odds in Charleston, aiming for his GED and maintaining a steady job. These two represent countless others whose lives are being influenced by staff members at DJJ. Although it looks different than I expected, I am following God's dream for my life, privileged to see people transformed by the power of the gospel. I can honestly say I wouldn't trade His plans for my own!

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