

# THE ADVENTURES OF **JUAN DOMINGO**

THE LIFE OF A MISSIONARY

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JUAN DOMINGO

The Adventures of Juan Domingo  
By Juan Domingo

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD .....	5
INTRODUCTION .....	7
CHAPTER 1 ONE CRAZY RIDE .....	9
CHAPTER 2 BEFORE CHRIST .....	13
CHAPTER 3 SMITTEN...FINALLY! .....	19
CHAPTER 4 BONKERS IN LOVE .....	27
CHAPTER 5 MY FIRST MISSIONARY TRIP TO MEXICO .....	37
CHAPTER 6 NO TURNING BACK.....	45
CHAPTER 7 A NEW NAME AND THE BIRTH OF A MOVEMENT .....	65
CHAPTER 8 THE MIRACLE WAREHOUSE: GARBAGE TO GLORY.....	75
CHAPTER 9 MEXICO IS SHAKEN TO THE CORE .....	87
CHAPTER 10 THE POWER OF EVIL OVERCOME .....	99
CHAPTER 11 MULTITUDES DISCOVER THE LIVING JESUS .....	115
CHAPTER 12 THE BLESSING ARRIVES .....	121
CHAPTER 13 OPTIMUM BLESSING .....	143
CHAPTER 14 DOORS TO RADIO AND TV FLY OPEN .....	149
CHAPTER 15 FINDING TRUE JOY .....	163
CHAPTER 16 PROMOTION COMES FROM THE LORD .....	177
CHAPTER 17 MY DREAM COME TRUE.....	185
CHAPTER 18 SEE YOU AT THE GATE .....	195



# Foreword

If you are a person who loves to read stories filled with awesome life lessons, you have just picked up the right book.

Juan Domingo is a real life person just like you. James Bond doesn't hold a candle to the experiences Juan has gone through. I believe that no one man has accomplished more in and for Mexico the wonderful works with God, than my friend Juan.

With an old VW bus carrying everything he owned, he rolled into Mexico City with a mountain of faith but not a single acquaintance or contact to ask for help.

Today colleges, schools, orphanages, medical clinics, churches and good works have resulted from his life, from border to border within Mexico. Tens of thousands have been delivered from alcoholism, drugs, unsafe sex, and bad attitudes. Now these young men and women live in Mexico as doctors, nurses, lawyers, entertainers, responsible mothers and fathers...as givers and not takers.

Enjoy this upbeat, challenging story and let your light shine that men will see your good works and so give the glory to God, as you read about a true gift of faith expressed through one whose heart is as large as the huge Zocalo Plaza in Mexico City.

MIKE MACINTOSH

*Senior Pastor, Horizon Christian Fellowship, San Diego, California*



# Introduction

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* chronicles a young man long ago whose antics cut across a culture steeped in racism, using humor to make a stand that all men are created equal. Many people today, however, are offended by his use of words that were common and accepted at the time and they miss the true moral of the story.

Today we live in a world where racism lurks just below the surface of the supposedly “politically correct” land in which we live. What would it be like to change your race, name and identity and live in another man’s skin?

This is precisely what Jesus did 2,000 years ago. He jumped into the Middle Eastern culture as a dark-skinned carpenter proclaiming that there is more to life than to just eat, drink and be merry. Indeed, He lived His life to the point that He was murdered for the truths He was proclaiming. Even those in His own family misunderstood Him. He faced the religious intolerance of the time by being a despised Nazarene, born as an apparent bastard. He stood up and faced death head-on, as He walked out of a rocky graveyard three days after being killed.

Today, more than ever, people see how unfair life is with some people having more money than they know what to do with, while others are crushed below a burden of simply trying to feed their family each day. Through the Internet and global satellite TV, poverty cannot be edited out of our daily consciousness. We watch as young people stage rallies on downtown streets around the world demanding change. In contrast, marketing executives successfully convince the world that if we just had a little bit more money, we would finally be happy. However, this is simply an illusion. It’s like a man dying of thirst in the desert walking endlessly toward the mirage. Although he is admired by men, he dies of thirst, having never reached the spring of eternal water.

What you are about to read is a story of someone who has lived out his life, taking on a whole new existence in a different culture, with a

different name and identity. This is a documentary showing that love and service can indeed trump racism, inequalities, injustices and even death—uncovering the true secret of eternal happiness and bliss. It is not found as you focus on yourself, but rather as the by-product of being consumed by an Almighty God, to live and love and finally die for what you believe.

Indeed, this is life's true purpose.

Every single Christian is an ambassador, as we represent our King to those whose paths we cross. This book holds the secret to prayer and spiritual revival to bring God's love to a world blinded by allusions and a false hope.

Prayer is not a last resort but rather the first option we have to overpower forces of evil and literally change the world in which we live. Becoming an intercessor is the key to being used by God for His purposes on this planet. We can stand in the gap with one hand tightly gripping the hand of Jesus, with the other hand pulling drowning individuals to safety.

Revival comes when a great number of people fall in love with Jesus. This book, through a personal story, shows how a hard, stony heart can be broken so that the Holy Spirit can flow through it to a lost and dying world.

My prayer is that revival would ignite your life as you prayerfully consider these truths, and that this awakening would spread through a heart that is consumed by an Almighty God, to do that which He longs to do...that is, to woo people back to Himself.



## CHAPTER 1

# ONE CRAZY RIDE

“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me’” (Isaiah 6:8).

“You’re going where? You’re getting there how? You’re sleeping in what?”

There I was in front of the old North Park Theater, where vaudeville performers, such as W.C. Fields and the Marx Brothers had catapulted their fame into the early film industry. More recently, the marquee of the theater had advertised the latest pornographic movie. But now the sign declared to the city, “Jesus loves you, San Diego!”

I had packed my remaining possessions in an old Volkswagen van that would be my transportation, my home, and my office on this missionary adventure, choosing to spend the rest of my life in Mexico. I had a box full of books, one box to store my clothes, and lastly, a box packed with food consisting of powdered milk, peanut butter, beef jerky, dry fruits and mixed nuts. I also had a small gas camping stove, four inches wide by eight inches tall, and a frying pan. I had a five-gallon jug of water that I would use for bathing by pouring it into a plastic cup then using it as I sat on the back bumper in my bathing suit.

What an adventure driving off in my van that warm, balmy California night, September 9, 1979. As I rumbled southeast toward the land of the Aztecs, I didn’t even know what city would be my final destination. A year later, I had arrived at a church in Mexico City where I was invited to teach in a Bible school. A kind and loving family, Oscar and Christi Venegas, with their five children, grandparents, aunts and others, invited me to stay in their home. When they heard I had been living in my van on the streets of Mexico City, they told me it was too

dangerous. They happily said, “Our home is your home. Please stay here with us.”

Unfortunately, I hadn’t learned to accept their hospitality gracefully. Instead I boasted, “For a whole year I have been sleeping in my van, and many of those nights out on the streets. One time I was parked on the bad side of town at midnight, when I heard men outside and I felt really scared. I asked God for His protection, and in that moment I was made aware of four big, strong angels, one posted on each corner of the van, standing watch to protect me.” This sweet family chuckled at my story.

This night, though, would be dramatically different. It was 3:00 a.m. and I was asleep in my van parked on the street outside of the Venegas home, when suddenly a crashing sound woke me up from a deep sleep. I crawled out of my sleeping bag, and found a drug addict with bloodshot eyes sniffing glue outside my van. With all his strength, he pounded his fists into the passenger door window to break it and try to rob me.

Terrified, I put the key in the ignition and tried to start the car. But the engine was cold and I couldn’t get the motor going. Finally, it turned over and I raced off into the cold night across deserted city streets, passing through the flashing yellow stoplights driving as fast as that van could go. I finally found a neighborhood where I could park and get back to sleep. Little did I know that I had wound up in Tepito, one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in all of Latin America.

No sooner had my head hit the pillow, there was another crashing sound again. My heart raced when I saw the same drug addict slamming on the window, angrier than ever, trying to get in and kill me. I screamed, “It’s a demon!” Completely horrified, my hand shook as I tried to put the key in the ignition again to start the van. But this time the motor was still hot, so it quickly took off and I raced back into the night. As I sped off, I looked in the side view mirror and lo and behold—the man was running behind my van in order to grab on.

Apparently he had held onto the back of my van, standing on my back bumper as I raced across the city. Thankfully, I was able to escape, even though I was sick to my stomach.



After a while I found another place to sleep, but I was sure the drug addict was going to find me and kill me. I couldn't sleep a wink. At 7:00 a.m. I knocked on the front door of the Venegas family home and asked if their offer of "Mi casa es tu casa" was still available. I realized that the Lord had placed me there. I lived with them for over two years while they taught me the language and culture of Mexico. Over thirty years later, they still consider me their adopted son.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones" (Proverbs 3:5-8).



## CHAPTER 2

# BEFORE CHRIST

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5).

I am the second son of James and Dorothy Lilley, born on April 10, 1957. I was not made aware of much of my ancestry until forty years later when I learned that my paternal grandfather was the owner of a citrus farm in Georgia. According to my mom, he decided to become a pastor when the crops failed. I had also learned that my dad felt a calling to preach as well, but decided to open an insurance business instead. He did very well as a broker and we lived in the Hollywood Hills on Mount Oak Drive.

It turned out my father was an alcoholic. On the way to marry my mom on their wedding day in Northern California, he was drunk and sound asleep in the back seat of the car. When their car finally pulled up, they realized that he had lost one of his shoes out of the window on the way. They found some other pair of shoes for him and my mom and dad got married in Paradise, California.

The marriage, however, was the furthest thing from paradise. My brother, James Lilley, was born in 1953, and shortly thereafter my parents separated. My mom had a career working in management at AT&T. She was an only child and had a sad childhood, because she always felt lonely. She did not want her son to go through what she had experienced, so she went back with my alcoholic father to procreate me. Soon after that, they got divorced and we moved to West Los Angeles.

My only memory of my dad was when I was five years old, when he took my brother and me to the international airport in Los Angeles to

see the big new jumbo jets take off and land. When we returned from the trip, he did a magic trick by making a balloon come out of the roof of the car. I asked, "How did you do that?" He said, "I'll tell you when you're older." Those are the only words I remember him saying to me. Soon thereafter, my father committed suicide by overdosing on pills, though at the time they told me that he died from a heart attack.

I was the only family member who did not attend the funeral. My family asked if I wanted to go and I said no. I stayed with our live-in nanny, a beautiful elderly African-American named Zerelda. She was an extremely kind person who loved Jesus with all her heart and I know she prayed for me. My grandparents on my mother's side were also strong Christians and they prayed for me too. But my mom had rebelled against the Lord and was very bitter against God.



My grandmother had founded the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) in Binghamton, New York; her forefathers had lived in the area since before the Revolutionary War in 1776. My grandfather

was a successful businessman who had built a beautiful estate in Upstate New York before moving to California.

Since my grandmother had been an elementary school teacher, she helped my brother, Jim, learn how to read. I learned to read even before my brother, who was four years older. I would accompany him to his classes with my grandmother and learned by looking over his shoulder. I was far ahead of the kids my age in school, so they took me out of public school and enrolled me in a private Christian school, Redeemer Baptist, where I skipped second grade and went straight into third.

In this Christian school, I memorized Scripture and I remember crying when I was not able to recite 1 Corinthians 13 in front of my fourth grade class. I also remember my fifth grade teacher, Robert Eckert, who prayed with me to receive Christ on February 19, 1966, even though it would be many years later until I actually surrendered my life to the Lord. He was one of the few men in my life and was an excellent man of God and a great role model.

By this time my mom got married again to a con artist who was a retired Mafia member. He was perverse and evil, and had deceived my mother. One time I confronted him when he said he had been a professional football player for the Pittsburgh Steelers. Upon investigation I found out that this was not true, so I told him he was a liar. Many times I threatened to call the cops because of the things he did, so he never touched me—others weren't so lucky. The hand of God had protected me.

The neighborhood where I lived had mostly single mothers and not one father at all. I never even met any of my friends' dads. I am so thankful for my fifth grade teacher, since I had never met a man like him—until years later when I met my real father, my heavenly Father.

I was an excellent student and I loved playing basketball. I would play hours upon hours in my driveway or at the local park. Sadly, I was

the shortest boy in my class until I graduated high school, so I was made fun of a lot. Because of my height, a neighborhood boy four years older bullied me also. He was a racist and in his meanness he would kill and torture cats in our neighborhood. His ambition was to one day be a policeman so he could beat up African-Americans and Latinos and receive a salary for doing so. His dream came true. He ended up working as an officer in the West Los Angeles Police Department for twenty years.

Sometimes this bully would torture me by holding me down and applying force on my pressure points until I cried from the pain. When I would see him coming, I would be terrified and sick to my stomach, afraid of my impending torture. One day, my mom came home from work and found my brother tied up, standing on a chair with a noose around his neck, with the rope attached to a tree branch. This evil kid was kicking the chair, trying to scare my brother. Once he handcuffed my brother to a chain-link fence throughout a whole day, leaving him to swelter in the blazing hot sun.

At school, the bullying was far less, although I was knocked unconscious three times. Once I was pushed head first into a brick wall. Another time two of my classmates, one grabbing my hands and the other grabbing my feet, started swinging me to see how high they could throw me up in the air. I landed on my back and passed out. Then as I was playing soccer, an older student with a forearm cast intentionally hit me in the head. The bullying at school wasn't something that terrified me, like in my neighborhood, because at school they did it just to be funny, although I didn't see anything humorous about it.

Years later, when I gave my life to Christ, the fact that I had been bullied turned out to be something that helped me tremendously. When I got older, I always chose to have big, strong friends around when I was traveling or surfing. Nobody messed with me then because they didn't want to tangle with my friends. When I became a missionary, I was fully conscious that Jesus was always walking next to me, there to



protect me from both the physical and spiritual enemy. I have walked through the most dangerous parts of Mexico at midnight, and honestly, I have not been afraid. If some spiritual power tried to harass me, I simply asked Jesus at that very moment to beat up the Devil and teach him a lesson if he messed with me.

First John 4:4-6 reads, “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

## SURFING WAS MY GOD

There was a new sport that was becoming a passion in my life. Before I learned how to walk, my mom had taught me how to swim. I still have a picture when I was a baby, asleep in the swimming instructor’s arms—inside the pool.

Summers in Southern California in the 60s saw the sport of surfing rocket in popularity. I grew up riding the waves at Santa Monica state beach. When I was twelve I was given my first brand-new surfboard, and when I reached high school, I stopped focusing on my studies and began going to the beach whenever the surf was good.

I believe that whatever you think about most is your god. At this time in my life, surfing was definitely my god, although I claimed to be a Christian. Many people see Christianity as a religion. But your religion is the driving passion in your life, not what you do on Sundays.

Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your

name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ (Matthew 7:21-23).

On the judgment day many will say, “Lord, Lord, did I not do many things in Your name?” Then Jesus will answer, “I didn’t personally know you so depart from Me, you who did evil things.” That was me. Today many people think they are Christians but they don’t have a personal relationship with Jesus at all.

“They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work” (Titus 1:16).

## CHAPTER 3

# SMITTEN...FINALLY

“We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

I had purchased a 1969 racy red Chevy Camaro complete with pin-stripes and hood locks. With my surfboard racks, two surfboards and clothes, I moved at the age of seventeen to Southern California to study at San Diego State University and to surf every chance I could. Back then, the pristine beaches and great weather made San Diego a surfer’s paradise.

During my first year in college I lived in a coed dormitory, at the height of the hippie movement. I never tried drugs, but back then, you could get stoned just by walking down the hallway at our dorm. Streaking was the fad, as young students would race around between the dorm buildings without any clothes on, wearing nothing but a big smile. It was a crazy time and as I look back, my Christian education was definitely a positive influence that kept me out of trouble. Not to say that there were a lot of things I wanted to do, but I knew better.

Pornography was on the rise at that time and I remember going to a porn flick in the local theater with some other students. This was before the days of videotapes, cable TV, and the Internet. We thought that lust was cool and a friend in the dorm had *Playboy* pinups covering the entire wall. Everybody was into free love and sex, but I just didn’t seem to fit in and I felt left out.

So I moved out of the dorm and rented a beach house with some surfer friends. We would chase the waves before and after classes. I loved surfing so much that I surfed in a dry suit, made of a rubber inner tube, which allowed me to wear my clothes underneath and go straight to school without even changing. I would simply unzip the dry suit and head to class. On the weekends we would camp out on

the beach in Baja during the epic swells of those years and we would surf until our arms were like Jell-O. During the winters of those years, I went twice to the North Shore in Hawaii and once I went on a surfing trip with a friend to central Mexico. I realized I wasn't as good of a surfer as I thought when I went surfing in Hawaii, so I decided to get serious about my studies.

I graduated college magna cum laude with my business degree. I then went on to have a perfect GPA in my graduate MBA program. I was a member of the student government, president of an honor society, and I represented our university in the intercollegiate national business games held in Reno, Nevada. Business came naturally to me.

Providentially, when I was born my mother chose my name and middle initial, John D., after John D. Rockefeller, one of the richest men in the world. Since I opened my first bank account at the age of five, I was always buying and selling baseball cards, firecrackers or whatever I could to make money. Even though my grandparents desired to raise me in a good Christian school, my mother took me out of the Baptist high school and sent me to the best academic school in Los Angeles because she didn't want me to become a fanatical Christian. Harvard Prep Academy was an all-boy school and I hated it. This school catered to the children of movie stars and celebrities. Gregory Peck's son, Anthony, was in my class, as well as Steve Allen's son. Anthony Peck would later go on to be a movie star and Hollywood producer.

I made some serious cash that year, gambling in my free time with these kids who had the money to spend. I was always good with numbers so it was easy for me to memorize the cards that had already been played. We placed bets on the cards and I won hands down. One of the students had a beach house north of Malibu, where we would often go to surf. Ronald Reagan, who was governor of California at the time, owned the house next door. Incredibly, he would conduct business right there on the sand as he sat in his beach chair with a table next to him and a phone wire that ran 100 feet back into his house. As busy as he was, he was always friendly to us.

It was the late 1960s when I first started buying stock in a company that was developing a whole new invention—something called computers. Growing up, my mother had taught me that money was to be invested rather than spending it unnecessarily and wasting it on purchasing items I didn't really need. Since my mother grew up during the Great Depression and the financial crisis of the 1930s, she taught me by example. My great aunt, who was married for the first time at the age seventy, was like a grandmother to me since she didn't have any children of her own. She was very generous and had invested her money wisely. She would later be our first financial supporter sending \$25 a month to the ministry.

When I was fourteen, I landed my first job cleaning tables at a pizza restaurant in the afternoons. From that time forward, every summer I would work doing various jobs. Back then, it was legal to work at that young of an age and I received a regular paycheck and paid taxes.

One summer, while working in Chandlers Shoe Store in Beverly Hills, I sold twenty-three pairs of footwear to the same lady in one visit. She loved to get the discounted shoes the very day they went on sale, so I made sure to help her out with that. I also sold shoes to a beautiful Hollywood actress who needed them for a scene she was shooting in a movie.

When I was just eighteen, I started my first business, along with my partner, Randy Nathan. He sold metal fireplaces and I installed them for him during my free time. There was a building boom in San Diego in the late 1970s and we did very well financially. In one house in Del Mar, I installed five fireplaces, one of which hung by chains, enhancing a breathtaking ocean view.

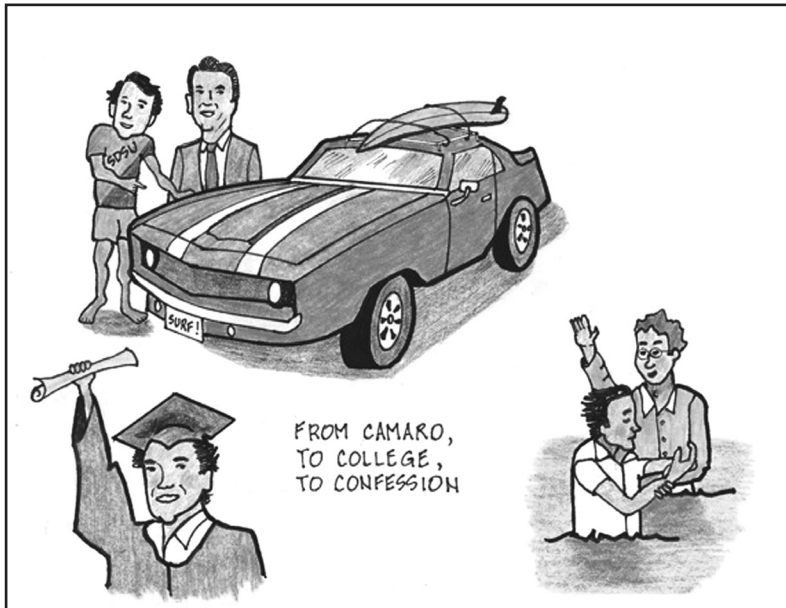
However successful I was in business, though, I was a complete failure in the area of romance. I remember when I was in high school the first time I finally had the courage to ask a girl out for a date. I chose

a place I knew she would like—Disneyland. She not only said no, but the next day she and her friends came up to me and made fun of me for asking her out while I was eating lunch with my friends. In spite of this, one girl did accept my invitation to go to the big high school prom dance, and I was so excited to be there. Unfortunately, once we arrived, she ran off with her friends and left me standing there all by myself. I got back into my car and drove home alone. When it came time for the big graduation celebration at Disneyland, I didn't ask anybody to go with me, fearing rejection. I stood there by myself as the bus drove off with the rest of the students of my graduating class heading to the famous Southern California amusement park for a night of partying.

In college I became accustomed to the rejection and never had a girlfriend until my senior year when I found unimaginable true love. I was at a dance having fun with a beautiful young lady and she invited me to an old movie theater for a Bible study on Sunday morning. I didn't go to church, but I sure wasn't going to miss this opportunity of perhaps finding my true love. That Sunday, I waited outside the theater for her to arrive. And I waited and waited and waited... but she never showed up. I was rejected again. Nevertheless, I walked into the movie theater anyway where my life turned upside down—or should I say, right side up. In early 1976 I walked into the old North Park Theater, gazing up at its fire-charred walls, never realizing this would soon become my home away from home. Upon entering, I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit, as the young people sang choruses to jamming Christian rock bands. And then when the music stopped, a simple, unassuming young man stood up wearing Levi's and a shirt and began to teach the Bible.

Mike MacIntosh was unlike any minister I had seen before. His sense of humor had me on the edge of my seat, and he spoke with such passion about the Bible that I knew right away that what he said was real in his own life. He talked about true love, something I had never experienced. He taught from the book of Galatians and said, "And those

who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24). I was convicted to the core. I knew I was guilty before God, not that He was condemning me, per se, but rather God was inviting me to walk with Him, the Creator and giver of true love.



About this same time, I finally encountered my first girlfriend and invited her to come hear the good news at the old theater. At the end of the message, there was an invitation to surrender one's life to the Lord, and I elbowed my girlfriend so she would go forward. I had gone to a Baptist school for ten years and had already said the sinner's prayer. Then again, when I elbowed her, I was feeling that I was the one who needed to turn away from the bad things I was doing and give my life to Jesus. My girlfriend didn't go forward, but I did. In the days that followed my priorities quickly began to change, and we broke up soon afterwards.

As president of the academic honor society, Sigma Iota Epsilon, one of my responsibilities was to find a speaker for the induction ceremony.

Because of my love for surfing, I had met Larry Gordon, the owner of the Gordon and Smith Surfboard Company. I invited him to share his business principles and Christian faith to the top business students and faculty at SDSU (San Diego State University). He told the story of how God blessed his business even though he didn't know what he was doing, and how he had become the leader in the industry as one of the top surfboard manufacturers in the world. At the end of his message, the wife of the dean of the business school raised her hand to ask a question: "What does it mean to be born again?" Larry then went on to present the good news of the cross in a way that fascinated many people that day.

The next month in January, Larry baptized me in the frigid waters of Mission Bay, along with dozens of other people. It was then that I understood I was born again. Not because I was baptized but because I realized my life had changed dramatically from the inside out. Two weeks later, it dawned on me that I had not spoken one word of profanity and my thoughts were totally different. I truly was born a second time.

I wanted so badly to find a Christian girl whom I could share my life with. As I think back to being a new believer, I remember I wrote a list of ten things I wanted in my wife, even though they weren't all that spiritual. I wanted her to be beautiful, spiritual, have a brilliant mind, wealthy, and so forth. Days later I went skiing at Mammoth Mountain in Northern California, and I met a girl who far exceeded any expectations. She was gorgeous, an outstanding student, was "on fire" for Jesus, and her father was a corporate lawyer for the Coca-Cola Corporation and very wealthy. Even though I was immature in my faith, God heard the sincerity of my heart.

I fell so in love with her. I couldn't believe she actually liked me. It seemed too good to be true, but it was. Although she lived in Brentwood (Los Angeles) and I lived in La Jolla (San Diego), we would go skiing, go to the beach or to a fancy restaurant in LA as often as our schedules permitted. But in the midst of this romance, something



amazing happened—I found myself more in love with Jesus than with her. My love for her paled in comparison to my love for Him. His love was more real, more satisfying, and I was simply smitten. I didn't expect her to understand, so I wasn't surprised that after telling her that Jesus was going to be my only love, I never saw her again. Jesus fulfilled 100% of my spiritual and emotional needs. I just couldn't take my mind or my eyes off of Him. And He consumed my thoughts.

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21).



## CHAPTER 4

# BONKERS IN LOVE

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5).

I was bonkers in love with Jesus. But because I was still running a business and attending graduate school, my time was focused elsewhere. In August 1978, I turned the business over to my partner and I took a month-long surf trip in Baja California, Mexico. It was then that I started reading the Bible, on my own, for the first time in my life. I read through the New Testament three times that month and I still couldn't get enough.

The San Diego School of Evangelism was starting at Calvary Chapel San Diego (later changing its name to Horizon Christian Fellowship), meeting in the old North Park Theater. I decided to enroll as the classes were in the morning and I could finish my MBA in the evenings.

## SEEKING THE SPIRIT

When I heard a teaching on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, I learned that some people received an incredible prayer language to communicate and worship the Lord in a whole new dimension. I earnestly sought this experience. I would drive into the mountains and lay down on my face, with my arms stretched out, begging the Lord to give me this gift. I bought a book detailing how to receive this gift and did everything it said, but speaking in tongues eluded me for weeks.

It came down to the Sunday before Bible school was to start. Mike MacIntosh was teaching about being filled with the Spirit. I wanted it so badly that it was killing me. I felt so close. I knew that if one of the ministers at the church were to lay his hand upon me, I would be filled with the Spirit. I was absolutely sure of it. After the service was over,

I looked for Mike. I looked for one of the ministers, but I couldn't find anybody. And I started to panic, thinking, *Tonight's the night, I'm sure of it, but I have to find somebody to pray for me.* I walked briskly through the entire facility, finally coming to the Sunday school rooms. Only the children's pastor, Mickey Stonier, was there and he was in the middle of counseling a young lady. I rudely interrupted him, grabbed Mickey by the shoulders and said, "You have to pray with me right now to be baptized in the Holy Spirit."

I got down on my knees and Mickey began to pray, and to pray, and to pray. Nothing happened. I was going to stay there all night, if necessary. I absolutely had to have this blessing. I wasn't going to leave without it. After Mickey prayed for thirty minutes or so, all of a sudden I felt the glory of God coming upon me and I began to speak in a new language I couldn't understand. It was the happiest moment of my life. I went back to the sanctuary and just stood there praising God in my prayer language, when suddenly everybody turned and stared at me. And I let them all know how Jesus had fulfilled His promise of power in me.

When the last person had left the sanctuary, I got into my car to drive home and I just sat there praising the Lord in my new language. I didn't want to lose this blessing. I went on for an hour or so and finally started the engine and drove onto the freeway. But I just couldn't stop praising the Lord. There on the freeway I felt the power of the Spirit as I worshiped the Lord with a loud voice. It was then I looked into my rearview mirror and saw the patrol car flashing its red lights. I instantly remembered that there was a traffic ticket I hadn't paid in my glove compartment. I thought for sure the officer was going to arrest me for not paying the ticket on time. When I rolled down the window to talk to the patrolman, I greeted him with a big smile because the joy of the Lord was too uncontainable. He said, "You were swerving all over the road back there. Are you okay?" I told him he could write me all the tickets he needed, or even arrest me, and I would still be the happiest person on the face of the earth because I'd been filled with the Spirit. He laughed and simply told me to drive home safely.

During the second week of Bible classes, I approached one of the teachers, Glenn Gundhert, and told him how God was using me at the university to share my faith with the professors and fellow students. Instead of saying, “That’s great,” or something like that, he looked me dead in the eye and said, “God didn’t use Chuck Smith until he totally surrendered to the Lord.” Jesus spoke to my heart in that moment, and His quiet voice told me that the greatest privilege on this planet is to serve the Lord. After we talked, I immediately went into a broom closet and got down on my knees. I was totally overwhelmed that I had the privilege to be an ambassador to the Most High God. In my mind, I saw my life and what it could be, in business or in politics. To be a CEO of a Fortune 500 company or a senator of the United States was absolutely nothing; completely insignificant compared to being a servant of God.

After twenty minutes or so, I went back into class, which had already started. I remember just sitting there staring at the chalkboard—I was caught up in a whole different world that was beyond words. When class ended, I drove straight to the university and got in line to fill out the paperwork necessary to drop out of my MBA program. As I was waiting in line, a Christian student I knew came up to me and asked what I was doing. I excitedly told him that I had been called to serve the Lord, and it was the most awesome privilege in the world. He then matter-of-factly reminded me that Paul the apostle waited three days and three nights before he made his life-changing decision. But before I could even doubt, the peace of God came upon me and I believe the Lord gave me confirmation that I was doing the right thing. I’ve never had a single doubt since.

### THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE

I immediately felt called to love those that nobody else cared about. I would look for the lost and lonely. I spent time in mental hospitals, making friends and sharing the love of Jesus. I slept on a living room floor in the house of a mentally distraught person, praying for them throughout the night, knowing this person had previously attempted

suicide. I befriended a man who had a speech impediment. I spoke to him in the very same slow drawn-out way he talked to me, even though people would stare at me. I didn't want my friend to feel uncomfortable and I wanted him to practice his speech therapy with me. At church services, I would wait until the last person left, looking for the one who was alone or looked sad and who needed prayer.

Years later when I was teaching at a church in San Diego, the assistant pastor came up to me and asked if I remembered him. I apologized and told him I didn't think so. He shared that he had waist-long hair when he visited the old North Park Theater. He said one night he was going to commit suicide because he felt that all Christians were hypocrites. He lingered after service until he was one of the last people there, when I walked up, put my arms around him, and prayed with him. Though I never knew it, God had used that hug to save that man's soul and send him toward the ministry. A hug can be such a powerful thing. I don't remember ever giving a hug or being hugged until I became a Christian, as my family showed little affection. It's amazing how God can use something as simple as a hug to change someone's life.

Jim was a fellow student at the School of Evangelism, and he was a real challenge for me to love. He had fried his brain on drugs during the hippie days. His long hair was rarely washed and he could be very rude. I continually reached out to him; I even took him to a circus that he wanted to attend in order to gain his friendship. I figured if I could love him, I could love anyone.

One Sunday evening as he walked into the theater, I greeted my friend and he responded by saying, "Let's go visit some hookers." I said, "No, Jim, let's go inside and worship the Lord." He responded, "Don't you ever get tempted by those beautiful girls?" I quickly silenced him, "Of course I've been tempted...who hasn't? Now let's go on into the Bible study." At the end of the school year, when Pastor Mike was praying along with the students on the last day, each one of us would take turns going to the middle of the circle and someone would lift up a

prayer. When it was my turn to be prayed for in the middle of a circle, wouldn't you know it, my friend Jim raised his voice and prayed, "Dear Lord, help my friend Juan with his terrible problem of lust." For years after that, people looked at me funny, even Pastor Mike.

### A CHAIN REACTION TO PRAY

William Willis was an Englishman saved in 1905 during the great Welsh revival. The revival, this incredible move of God, brought conviction so powerful that coal miners would crawl out of the tunnels in tears, crying out for forgiveness from their evil lifestyles. Evan Roberts was the man God used to bring this great spiritual awakening to England. This revival began as he would cry out to God for the Lord to break him. "Lord, break me. Lord, break me, Lord...please, break me." He continued to pray this until one day, God answered his prayer, and Jesus broke the clay jar of his heart to flood the Welsh people with the power of the Spirit.

Mr. Willis was sixteen years old at the time, and after his conversion, he continued to pray that same prayer for the rest of his life. "Break me, Lord." As a missionary, he saw revivals break out in Korea and Canada before retiring in a Salvation Army home located in Huntington Beach, California. Interestingly enough, this coincided with the explosion of the Jesus People Movement in Southern California. I believe this movement was birthed through intercessory prayer, for at the same time, Chuck and Kay Smith were also praying for the lost young people, and eventually God would use Chuck to usher in the Jesus Movement which grew into thousands of churches.

Mike MacIntosh had met Mr. Willis and moved him down to San Diego, at ninety years of age, asking him if he would teach on prayer. Listening to Mr. Willis, I realized that you can do more through prayer than you could ever do through preaching, teaching, or just about anything else. He and I would pray for hours together, asking God to break us and to send revival. Although he was born in the 1800s and was seventy years older than me, we shared a kindred spirit. I so enjoyed spending time together with this great man of God. The last

years of his life, he spent much time praying for us and for the people of Mexico. I am so incredibly thankful for this man, and I can't wait to see him again in heaven, to pray and worship together once again.



### GROWING IN GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE

Raul Ries, whose dramatic conversion was featured in the movie, "Fury to Freedom," came to teach at our Bible school and shared the beauty of fasting coupled with intercessory prayer. I was so excited to start fasting that I tossed my peanut butter and apple sandwich made with home-baked whole grain bread into the trash and started a three-day fast. Fasting became an important part of my life for the next three years, and I continue to believe that it is an important weapon to destroy spiritual strongholds in people's lives and in our communities.

I believe fasting is a joyous privilege of the believer, and it causes us to focus and concentrate in prayer, and to be more earnest in seeking the Lord's face. When we feel hunger, we are reminded that we are in a time of dedicated prayer.



It was at this time I first heard the teaching of the pastor and founder of the Calvary Chapel Movement, Chuck Smith. He taught three times at our school. Once he taught the entire book of Ruth on a Wednesday night from memory, without even opening the Bible. I could sense something very special in this man as he taught. Little did I know then that three years later my life would be forever changed when I listened to him via cassette tapes teach the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and I finally experienced the believer's rest of faith through the finished work of the cross.

### INFALLIBLE TRUTHS

As I became more aware of spiritual and heavenly things, two things really cemented my faith in the true and living God. The first life-changing truth was when I studied scientific creationism or intelligent design as a theory about man's origins. I attended a debate at the university, featuring Dr. Duane Gish, a noted scholar and founder of the Creation Museum in San Diego. As the secular scientists—(whom I had acclaimed before coming to Christ)—challenged Dr. Gish's statements, he dismantled their theories one by one. They were left speechless to his explanation of how the second law of thermodynamics worked in the evolutionary process. I walked away from that debate realizing that these professors were wrong. They had taught me that life came about through spontaneous generation, a mystery they could not explain. In an attempt to mask this, science invented the Big Bang theory as an idea on how energy first became involved in the universe. For if we lived in a closed system, there must have been an energy source to create the world in the first place.

When I look at the Bible now, I see that in the beginning God spoke, and “Bang!”...matter was created. Thereafter, when the people that God had created rebelled against Him, the second law of thermodynamics entered into the cosmos and the world began degenerating. Life has never since spontaneously generated from nothing.

Scientific evidence also pointed to the extinction of dinosaurs through a meteor impacting our planet, destroying a water vapor canopy that

had allowed plants and animals to grow hundreds of years and to great dimensions. The imploding of this canopy caused a worldwide flood and ended the “greenhouse” worldwide climate. This was evidenced by the mastodon dinosaurs found frozen in Siberia with tropical vegetation in their stomachs. This climate change also fits in the ice ages and extinction of dinosaurs. Science cannot prove creation, but it certainly cannot prove evolution or the fossil record either. Neither one of these theories can be proven as they are in fact simply theories.

Another truth that cemented my faith in God is the accuracy of the Scriptures. I had come to realize that Christianity has a highly intellectual base, and through history man’s theories have changed. But the Word of God hasn’t changed and doesn’t need to change because it is true. We can base our past, present and our future on the absolute certainty that the Bible is completely true.

Archaeologist William Ramsay started his career as an atheist in the early 1900s. The science of archaeology was still young when this rich and socially prominent atheist graduated from Oxford University. He used his wealth and social status to publicize his confidence that archaeology could disprove the Bible and discredit Christianity.

In his endeavor to discredit the Bible, Ramsay targeted the New Testament book of Acts, since the book of Acts records in great detail the explosive growth of Christianity after Jesus rose from the dead. Ramsay aspired to refute this record thinking it was vulnerable because it contains details, such as the names of officials, even naming the tetrarchs who were sub-governors and describing cities and distances. All Ramsay had to do was disprove one of these many details to discredit both the Bible and Christianity.

Atheist William Ramsay spent decades in the Holy Land, digging and researching, trying to disprove the book of Acts. But to his surprise, instead of disproving it, he actually became a Christian. Ultimately he proved the reliability of the entire New Testament and he became a distinguished Christian apologist in the early 1900s.

Perhaps more compelling still was when I was exposed to the ministry of Jim Hesterly. He came to the North Park Theater and taught a Bible series based upon the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Each night after Jim would teach, I would pray for God to give me the gift that he had taught, and many times I would receive them. When Jim taught on the gift of healing, I witnessed something that would once again shatter scientific concepts upon which I had based my reality and understanding of truth.

I remember after his teaching one night, he started to pray for those in a crowd of a thousand who wanted to be healed. He began praying for a person who needed healing of a burn on their right forearm, and how God was even restoring hair growth on their arm. Another person was healed of a back condition. He asked those who had been healed, perhaps twenty of them, to come forward, make a line, and take turns telling the crowd what had transpired. One by one, they declared how they had been instantly healed.

My previous misconceptions were shattered again when I heard one person in particular share. As she was talking, the Holy Spirit gave her a word of knowledge. This young lady pointed to the right side of the auditorium and said, "I have never done anything like this before, but I believe there is somebody sitting over there whose throat is being touched. If God is healing you right now, please stand up." My jaw dropped when a young man stood up and told everyone about his surgery that was scheduled the next day, and how his tumor had suddenly disappeared. This wasn't some manipulating faith healer planting subjective thoughts into a person's subconscious mind and convincing them something was happening. No, this was a sovereign work of God's Holy Spirit through a young lady who obviously was emotionally overcome and surprised that God was working a gift of healing through her. And the man who was healed was overwhelmed with emotion through the love of God touching his body.

### AN UNDENIABLE FAITH

After hearing, seeing and experiencing these undeniable truths of God,

there is absolutely no doubt in my conscious or subconscious mind that the Bible is true. My faith wasn't based on the theories of man, but rather on the fact—the unchangeable fact—that God is indeed who He says He is, and that Jesus indeed rose from the dead after being buried for three days. I believe that if a person honestly seeks the truth, then, just as Jesus assured the Jews who believed in Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32). Oh, how my heart breaks for those who have never heard the simple truth that Jesus Christ is alive today and loves a lost and dying world.

The biggest miracle of all for me to believe the existence of God was that Jesus has totally and radically changed MY life. I was a completely new person on the inside. What bliss knowing that this was His work, for His glory. My life did not go through a total restoration or make-over, but rather the old man was crucified, and I was a totally new creation.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

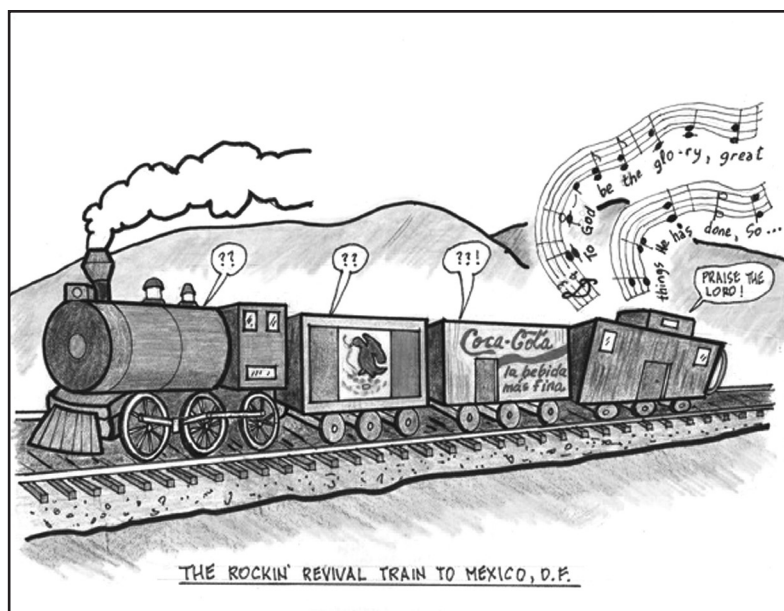
## CHAPTER 5

# MY FIRST MISSIONARY TRIP TO MEXICO

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’” (Mark 16:15).

In February of 1978, I enrolled as a student in the School of Evangelism. As part of the practicum, we were required to take a five-week trip to another part of the world to live out what we were learning. We could choose from Israel, England, Alaska, Hawaii or Mexico. Since I had spent two winters surfing on the North Shore in Hawaii, I calculated that I could go back and do some evangelism to the other surfers out in the water. However, I knew that I had to pray first to determine where the Lord would have me go. In my prayer, I kept thinking very strongly, *Where would Jesus go? Where would Jesus go?* I said to myself, “This is a no-brainer.” Jesus would go to Mexico where there are multitudes of people who are poor and hurting.

I had my answer, so twelve of us from the school traveled three hours to the dusty, desert town of Mexicali, where we boarded a train bound for Mexico City. We had no idea what we were doing. We arrived late and the only available train car was the last one, which had wood benches and a hole in the floor for a bathroom. We later found out that there was no electricity in our car either. This old train broke down repeatedly, stretching an already long journey into one that seemed endless. We started our voyage by praying together and singing worship songs. We had our faith, a guitar, and only two Spanish speakers, but that was enough. Arturo was our leader, and Maria was an immigrant from Chile, who was like a second mother to many of us from the school. After spending the first night trying to sleep upon the wooden benches, the next day we found ourselves rumbling slowly through the scorched, barren desert of Sonora.



## SHARING JESUS

Word got around that there were some crazy gringos singing up a storm in the last railroad car. People with nothing else to do came and sat down to listen to us sing with all our hearts to the Lord. After a while, they started asking questions about what we were doing on a third class train in the middle of nowhere. It gave us an opportunity to share about our faith in Jesus and as a result many people prayed to accept the Lord. We read to them a gospel tract that asked the question, "If you died the moment you read this, would you go to heaven or hell?" These deeply religious people began to pray and ask Jesus to forgive them of their sins.

When the train conductor came into our car, he too heard the gospel message and joyously prayed to receive Christ's forgiveness. Then as people boarded the train, he invited them to join the revival that was happening in the back of the train and how they too needed to go in there and hear the message of good news. I would say we probably prayed with about 200 people and the Holy Spirit moved powerfully

among these people, bringing many of them to tears as they met the living Jesus for the first time.

As day turned into our second night on the train, we traveled into the tropics entering into an oppressive heat near the town of Mazatlan. An eight-year-old boy walked into the last train car and came right up to us wanting to know more about this Jesus. There was something very different about this boy. One minute he was happy, and then the next minute he was mumbling and grabbing the girls in an inappropriate manner. As we watched him, my fellow students and I began praying for this boy. We didn't know what was going on other than sensing something was very strange. As we prayed for this little guy, laying hands on him, he seemed to change personality and started saying some terrible things.

The next day was a long and weary train ride and by that third night, we had only arrived as far as Guadalajara, so we decided to get off the train to get some sound sleep at an inexpensive hotel there. In the middle of the night, Maria Mladeneo, our beloved sister from Chile, was awakened and started pounding on Arturo's door. She frantically explained that Satan had appeared to her saying that we had been holding Satan himself on the train ride. It was then that we realized that the eight-year-old boy had been demon-possessed. We then calmed Maria down, assuring her that she had been holding a precious little eight-year-old boy—not Satan.

## FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

The next evening we boarded another train for an all-night trip to our final destination to Mexico City. Again we began our journey singing and praising the Lord. On this train, a fourteen-year-old boy, Alfredo, came to us in tattered clothes. He looked like he hadn't bathed for weeks, and his face was soiled from sleeping on the streets. As we talked to him, he told us how he was locked up in the darkness. Suddenly, his voice changed. We began to share about salvation by faith, and to our surprise he snapped back, speaking in Spanish,

“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:19-20). There was no way that this boy could have possibly known the biblical terminology he was using—he wasn’t even in school. Then his voice drastically changed again and he claimed to be a famous celebrity, boasting that we should envy him.

It was obvious that he was demon-possessed. We had learned in Bible school that we needed to pray continuously until the demons left, no matter how long it took. So we started praying at 10:00 p.m. and around 2:00 a.m. the demons began to come out one by one. We continued to pray fervently. I vividly remember this night like it was yesterday. I stepped out between train cars, where no one could hear me, and I prayed loudly in the middle of night. A friend, Rusty Birkeland, who would later become a well-known pioneer missionary to China, came up behind me while I was praying. He put his hand on my shoulder and I nearly jumped out of my shoes, thinking it was a demon placing his hand on me. He jumped too when he saw my look of terror—saying that I looked white as a ghost.

Around 5:00 in the morning, the last demon came out of Alfredo. We were all thrilled as we could see the presence of Jesus on his face. He wept as he declared to us, “I’m in the light and the darkness is gone.” As we neared Mexico City, he made us promise that we would “wait for him at the gates of heaven” as he didn’t know anybody there. He wanted us all to go in together. And we told him to wait for us as well if he got there first. I can’t wait to see Alfredo again when I enter those glorious, heavenly gates.

## LOVING THE MEXICAN CULTURE

When we arrived in Mexico City, we visited a small church that met in the carport of the home of the pastor, Paco Brito. After the service he invited us upstairs for a meal, but the service never really ended. It was wonderful. We continued to worship and sing as we sat around the large table, eating tamales and rejoicing together. This went well



into the night and continued into the early morning hours. Then he invited us back for the next service where we had the opportunity to share some songs and testimonies. I've never experienced anything like this before. It was a nonstop celebration. We fell in love with the Brito family and we spent another night eating and sharing like we had the previous night. I had never experienced such joy. I fell in love with their culture. Instead of rushing off to other commitments, the most important thing for these people was to unite and worship God and fellowship together.

At that time in Mexico, Pope John Paul had just made his first visit to the country, and the people of Mexico were very enthusiastic for the Catholic faith. Unfortunately, that translated into severe persecution toward Bible believers who Catholics considered as part of an evil cult. This oppression and hatred toward believers made fellowship so much sweeter, since evangelicals were criticized and ostracized by their families and friends.

I felt like we were living the book of Acts, as the giving and sharing among believers was simply amazing. As we traveled around the city, people wanted to know more about Jesus, not having heard the Bible taught before. Although I didn't speak any Spanish, there was no doubt in my mind, nor has there been any doubt since, that I was called to spend the rest of my life serving the people of this beautiful country.

## THE GOSPEL IN MEXICO

This call of God upon my life was, in part, a result of realizing that God loves everybody equally. As I reflected upon the availability of Christianity in the United States, I felt that Americans took it for granted. In Mexico millions of people had never even heard the message of the Bible—not even once. I would come to learn later that people would walk six to eight hours just to hear me teach a Bible study when they learned that I was teaching in a remote village. Obviously, if you had traveled that far, you would want to get the most out of that moment.

At that point in the history of Mexico, there had never been a revival, an awakening, or any kind of public evangelism. There were no Christian TV or radio shows, no Christian universities, schools, magazines, or large Bible-teaching churches. The gospel had come to Mexico in the early 1900s by Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries, but they had made little impact except in the southern states of Tabasco and Chiapas. In Chiapas, a bordering state with Guatemala, a Presbyterian missionary had led his gardener to Christ. Though the fruit of the missionary's time there was limited, this gardener turned out to be a great church planter who started many churches in that area.

In the 1930s, Cameron Townsend, a missionary in Oaxaca, was ministering in a small village when he got the idea to divert water from the spring in the plaza to irrigate crops so that the indigenous people could prosper. The president of Mexico at the time, Lazaro Cardenas, heard about Townsend's work helping the indigenous people, and he was so intrigued that he traveled all the way to this village to check it out firsthand. President Cardenas was so impressed by this humble missionary that he invited Cameron Townsend back to Mexico City—and the Wycliffe Bible Translators mission was born.

However, in the 1970s the communist party held a huge influence in the schools and culture, and the government expropriated the Wycliffe Center in southern Mexico City. This was the era in which I first arrived. It was time to let Jesus love these people through the least likely candidates—some kids from America who didn't even speak Spanish.

On the train ride back to California, the train made many stops in towns and villages along the way. On one particular stop in Santa Ana, Sonora, I got off with some of the other students to hand out gospel literature. As I was pointing at a tract, trying to get somebody to translate it for me, all of a sudden I realized the train was departing from the town. Santa Ana was a junction where many trains passed through without stopping. Terrified of being stranded, I started sprinting as

fast as I could after the train and finally grabbed a hold of the handle, and then jumped onto the train's bottom step. Immediately I heard somebody yelling, "Wrong train. Wrong train. Get off!" I looked back and realized that the students were still back there and waving their arms. Just like you would see in the movies—I jumped. But it wasn't like in the movies where the train jumper just dusted themselves off and moved on. No, I tumbled onto coarse gravel and got pretty scraped up, sending me into shock. It wasn't until the students gave me some orange juice that I regained my orientation. But looking back, I sure was glad that I got off that train in time.

### PREPARING FOR THE WORK

Upon returning to San Diego, I began preparations to move back to Mexico as soon as the Bible school finished the semester. In the meantime, I got involved in the ministry teaching as an assistant Sunday school teacher for the third grade kids. I was also invited to teach a Bible study at Mount Soledad Presbyterian Church in La Jolla. And during the same time, I was asked to start a Bible study at the University of California, San Diego. I studied William Barclay's commentary on Matthew and opened my mouth to teach these college students. It was like I was listening to my own voice, shocked to hear that what I was saying actually made sense. This was the first time I had ever done any public speaking or teaching in my life. The group grew to over fifty students so we rented an auditorium at UCSD and showed the movie, "Future Survival." After the movie I stood in front and publicly invited about 400 students to receive Christ, and many responded. Today some of the people from that Bible study group are still my friends.

At the Presbyterian church, the Thursday night Bible study group grew from twenty to over eighty young people. One Thursday I decided to let the Holy Spirit speak through me, so I didn't prepare a message. I simply read through the entire New Testament that week. But when I opened my mouth, nothing came out. I waited for the anointing and

stood there with my mouth open. The people sat there and just stared at me. Panic-stricken, I randomly opened my Bible and read a verse, but I had no idea what that passage was talking about. That was the last time I didn't prepare properly for a Bible study. The Spirit of the Lord was moving there, yet I knew where I was called to go.

The summer after the School of Evangelism finished, I joined a Bible discipleship group with one of the teachers from school. Glenn Gundhert, the same man that God used to call me to the ministry, was now teaching us how to study New Testament books in the Greek language. I remember the first homework assignment he gave us. In college I rarely did homework, so when I showed up without doing the assignment I was surprised when Glenn raised his voice, pointed his finger at me and said, "If you don't do your homework, I don't want you here." Since I never had a father figure, instead of taking offense, I really appreciated it when Glenn would take a personal interest in me. My life changed as I began to study the New Testament in the Greek language sixteen hours a day. The Lord gave me self-discipline to study hours and hours at a time. It would prove to be the best gift that I had ever received since accepting the gift of eternal life.

On my own I wrote a 600-page Greek exegesis of several New Testament books. I continued to work on it even during my first year in Mexico. It was to lay the groundwork for a teaching ministry that I never imagined.

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

"Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble" (2 Peter 1:10).

## CHAPTER 6

# NO TURNING BACK

“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’” (Romans 1:17).

Even as the strong summer Santa Ana winds buffet Southern California in the fall and cause massive firestorms, God’s Spirit, like a mighty rushing wind, had ignited a fire in me that would blow south. The day had arrived when I packed up an old Volkswagen van and moved to Mexico. I sold my brand-new car and purchased a Volkswagen bus from an ex-drug addict who needed the money. He was honest with me and told me he had spent a lot of money trying to fix it, but it still ran poorly. I took it to a mechanic and it turned out that the stick shift plate that changed the gears was screwed on backwards. They screwed it on correctly and the van ran great.

John Wesley, a famous Christian theologian, once said that whenever he had too many commitments to complete in just one day, he would pray three hours in the morning instead of just two. I like that. The day before I left for Mexico, I took some extra time to pray, and because I did, I didn’t have time to drive to the bookstore to buy the one book I really needed, *501 Spanish Verbs*. As I left my prayer closet—the same broom closet where I had received my first call from the Lord—I crossed the street in front of the North Park Theater and got into my van. At that very moment, a car swerved over and pulled right in front of me. The driver got out with a big smile on his face and placed a book in my hands, telling me that he was glad he found me before I left because I was going to need this book. It was the exact book I had planned to purchase, *501 Spanish Verbs*. This was so typical of the way God provided for me as I began my adventure to Mexico.

Somebody also slipped a card with a Scripture written in it into my Bible. It became the centerpiece to the ministry God would do in Mexico. It read, “Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him” (Hebrews 10:38). Jesus wanted me to have the same *kamikaze* attitude that I had in surfing big powerful waves. I needed to be fearless as God would put me in critical positions where my life would be in jeopardy. Faith could and would truly move mountains.

I also began my adventure to Mexico with the understanding that I had nothing to offer the people. I could not speak the language, I didn’t know the culture, and I didn’t know where I was supposed to go. I had only been reading the Bible for thirteen months and I really didn’t know what I was doing. I understood that God had called me to be a missionary to Mexico. He would lead me and teach me all that I needed to know. And if I were the one to do the ministry myself, it would be a nightmarish failure because my sinful nature would truly make a mess of everything. All that the Lord wanted from me was to live by faith. There was nothing I could do in my own strength and abilities to advance the kingdom of God. All I could do was mess things up through my pride, insensitivity to others, and a hard heart. I would have to walk in the Spirit, by faith, if I were to please God. I had made up my mind and I was committed. It was not an option to turn back.

### THE MISSION: THEN AND NOW

Hernando Cortez was the Spanish conquistador, who in 1504 first arrived in Santo Domingo, now the Dominican Republic, when he was only eighteen years old. When he arrived in mainland Mexico in the southern port of Veracruz, he was accompanied by eleven ships, 500 men, thirteen horses and a small number of cannons. He disembarked in the sweltering tropical heat. As he and the men started marching inland through the lush tropical jungles, he ordered that the ships which had brought them all the way to this new land be set on fire. There was no turning back. He embraced the impossibility to

return to the ships if they faced hardship. He was a young man passionately committed to his mission, though his goal was merely riches and fame.

Cortez brought death and destruction to the people and culture by robbing and pillaging the villages. How much more should those of us who bring life and freedom be committed wholeheartedly to the divine task of God?

We have a true spiritual mission that doesn't rob people but rather blesses people for all of eternity. Psalm 20:7 says, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God." In Zechariah 4:6 we read, "'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts."

The best thing about walking by faith and not by our natural sight is that you can never go wrong. All things work together for good. The Bible also declares, "Those who know Your name will put their trust in You; for You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You. Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion. Declare His deeds among the people" (Psalm 9:10-11). Those who trust in the Lord will never be ashamed or let down. I simply need to trust Him to break my natural inclinations and let His love supernaturally flow through my broken heart. Much like when Moses struck the rock and water gushed out so the multitudes could be refreshed, my heart had to be broken of self so that God's perfect love could gush forth to a dry and thirsty land in Mexico. The psalmist said, "I had fainted (would have lost heart), unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living" (Psalm 27:13).

### **FRIENDS BID FAREWELL**

It was a Sunday night when I was going to embark on the adventure of my life. After the last service at the theater, Mr. Willis, the man God used to teach me these truths, found out that I was leaving for Mexico as a missionary. He lifted up his hands to get the attention of those standing around the front of the theater. Then he laid hands

on me in prayer and sent me out to Mexico on a balmy fall evening, September 9, 1979. As I reflect back, one of the greatest gifts I have ever received from the Lord is the friendship of amazing people. There in the church parking lot, Scott McDonald, Andy Caldwell and some others who had been faithful friends for all these years bid me farewell. Even though I went off alone into Mexico, my friends have never forgotten me and have continually kept me before the Lord in their prayers. The Bible study groups from UCSD and La Jolla also kept me in prayer, occasionally sending a check, and writing letters updating me about what was going on in their lives.

Over the years, Jesus continues to bring many more incredible individuals from Mexico and from around the world into my life to count as friends. They were the ones who held my arms up spiritually when I was weary. They were the ones who stood behind me in prayer, and partnered with me financially to bring the gospel to multitudes in Mexico.

My friendships remind me of a Bible story. There was a group of rag-tag warriors fighting for David, the future king of Israel, who were ordered to stay on the home front while the troops went out to battle. The Bible says, "But as his part is who goes down to the battle, so shall his part be who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike" (1 Samuel 30:24). These faithful members were given the same reward as those who risked their lives in the war. By the same token, missionaries must also have people standing behind them as they go off to war. Those who serve as senders will share in the same eternal reward.

Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, stated that God's work, done God's way, will never lack God's supply. As I look back I can see how in the first few years as a missionary I didn't need much as I lived in my van or stayed with a family. But after three years, as the ministry expanded, the first two churches started to support our ministry monthly. Until then, my dear great aunt, Eleanor, sent me \$25 a month. The Lord multiplied that money and I never missed a meal. Granted, I had a big supply of peanut butter, powdered milk, and powdered instant beans in my Volkswagen van which was my home base for the first year. It was during this time that I learned to trust Jesus for all my needs, yet to live as simply as possible.



The life of Reese Howells inspired me. He was the subject of a book in the early 1900s called *The Intercessor*. He learned to eat like the poorest of the poor in order to identify with them, so that he might gain a place of intercessory prayer on their behalf. He didn't make his needs known to man but God provided supernaturally, just as He had done with another great missionary, George Mueller, who fed hundreds of orphans by only relying upon prayer to a generous God.

But God's supernatural provision doesn't mean that we won't go through times of trial. One time I was in a mountain village with nothing to eat. I remember distinctly saying to myself, "It is easy for Chuck Smith to say, 'Where God guides, God provides,' because he lives in Orange County with all the rich people." However, it turned out that same day a poor family invited me to their home to share their beans and tortillas. Jesus never once failed His promise to take care of me, even through my health difficulties, which required me to eat six meals per day. Even though sometimes I couldn't see a way forward, Jesus always came through. Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." He didn't pray, "Give us our daily chocolate cake."

I learned the joys of the simple life. Playing soccer with barefoot kids amid clouds of dust with two rocks for goalposts. I found that joy does not come from material possessions, but rather through friendships and giving. I found it hard to receive a few pesos from a person who was desperately poor, but I also learned that to receive those pesos was to honor them in their giving and to allow them to have an eternal reward in heaven.

### GOD, THE MECHANIC

As I drove that old VW van into Mexico, I stopped along the way and purchased a book entitled, *How to Keep Your Volkswagen Alive: A Manual of Step-By-Step Procedures for the Compleat Idiot* (sic). Even that book was over my head. I have no mechanical aptitude whatsoever. As I drove through towns and villages, I arrived somewhere in the state of Zacatecas, when the engine in my van began to make some very terrible noises. I studied my repair manual and concluded

that there was something wrong with the valves of the motor. I was stopped on the two-lane highway not far from a dusty dirt lot with a mechanic sign on it. Remember now, I didn't speak Spanish.

Soon a twelve-year-old boy came walking out from the mechanic's dirt lot and urged me to start the engine while he listened. I had been sitting there waiting for the motor to cool, because the book advised to adjust the valves when the motor has cooled. But this kid jumps under my van, pops off the valve cover and begins to adjust the valves with just a screwdriver. Now, I knew that you needed a calibrator to measure the exact space for the valves, so I was yelling at the kid to stop, thinking he was going to ruin the motor. But he didn't stop. He continued adjusting the valves with a screwdriver on a very hot VW bus engine. In my frustration, I turned to the Lord and started praying. And in the middle of my prayer, the Lord spoke clearly, "Who do you think is fixing your motor, anyway?" After two minutes, the kid rolls out from under the van in a cloud of dust and asks me to start it. I skeptically turned over the engine, got it to start—and it purred. It had never sounded better. I asked the boy how much he was charging, and he smiled and said, "You can buy me a soda."

### SIMPLE LIVING

At night, I would park among the tractor-trailers that were stopped along the highway. Though I couldn't talk to the truckers as I didn't speak Spanish, I really prayed for them. I lived like they did and I understood life on the highway. In everything I did, I learned to empathize and feel what the people were feeling. In order to intercede for people, one needs to feel their reality. It is not an intellectual endeavor, but rather experiencing their pain and praying accordingly. This is something I could apply in the years ahead, even after I had learned the language.

I got the hang of living on next to nothing. I began to cut my own hair which, by the way, has saved me over \$4,000 plus \$1,000 in gasoline, as well as 600 man-hours over the last thirty-four years. In the open markets, I purchased bruised fruit for pennies. I would walk wherever

I could in order to save gas. In order to be a good steward of God's money, we need to be aware of how much things cost, and invest as wisely as possible in God's kingdom, not on our own wants and desires.

I think it is a mistake for a missionary to live isolated from the people and never grasp the intricate details of the culture and daily life. Jesus said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:58-62).

Jesus became a man and lived as a man, without a place to even lay His head. He felt the cold, damp dirt beneath Him, as He slept outside on the cold nights in the Judean desert. I'm sure He would wake up with His shoulder and hip sore from the hard ground. He would awake with flea bites and perhaps a sore throat from preaching late into the night. He could relate to people because He lived like they did. He felt their pain and injustices as He lived among them.

### MINISTERING AT MY FIRST DESTINATION

After waiting for half a day for an independence parade to clear the streets, my seven-day drive was finally over. I made it all the way to the city of Puebla, three hours south of Mexico City. However, I didn't have a peace in my spirit, so the next day I turned around and drove back to Mexico City. For the next three months, I lived in the basement of a missionary's house, where I dedicated myself to writing and working on my New Testament commentary fourteen hours a day. While living there I helped two hours a day partaking in the household chores and I also helped in the Sunday school at their church.

During this time, Alejandro Alonso and his band, Fe y Razon (Faith and Reason), performed a concert at the National University. When

the concert was over, I went into the crowd with my little gospel tract, asking people what they thought about the message (in as little Spanish as possible). One Marxist zealot, seizing the opportunity, started sharing with me his ideology and ideas for a better world. He went on and on, and I simply smiled and nodded my head; I didn't understand a word of Spanish he said. When he had finished, I looked at him, smiled, and without speaking a word I pointed to the tract so he would read it. He looked at it, but once again launched into his discourse about the virtues of communism. Again he went on and on while I simply smiled and listened. When he was finished I pointed to the tract again, and this time he read the whole thing and repeated the prayer with me at the end to receive Christ as his Savior. This all happened without me saying a word.

Another day at the university, I saw something that would drastically impact my spiritual life. A young man was riding a motorcycle without a helmet. He had a bottle of tequila in one hand and as he went around a corner, the bike skidded out from under him and his head slammed into the edge of the curb, instantly killing him. God opened my spiritual eyes and I saw this man's soul go straight into the center of the earth, to hades. Normally, when we see somebody die, we think maybe they had received the Lord at some time in their life. But the stark spiritual reality of Mexico at the time hit me right between the eyes, as I saw this gruesome sight and imagined the Devil casting this man's soul down into the pit.

In January of 1980 my missions pastor (the director of my Bible college) came to visit me in Mexico City. He had taught me early on that obeying God signifies that you are not always going to please men. When the Lord called me to study the Word of God full-time, I had only been reading the Bible for about a year when I left for the mission field. So when my missions pastor came to see me, he began to teach me many practical insights on missionary living, as he himself had been a missionary in Brazil. He observed that I hadn't learned any Spanish and I was shut away in my room for fourteen hours a

day studying. He wisely said, “The pipe has to have water flowing through it or the water will become stagnant.” That might be true, but I knew God had called me to study at that point in time. However as I thought about his visit, the Lord used his counsel so that I was open for God to move me on to a new city.

### NEW LESSONS IN HUMILITY AND OBEDIENCE

I drove back to the city of Puebla, and lived in my van in a Pentecostal church parking lot so I could study the Bible day and night. Ninety-five percent of the evangelical churches were Pentecostal. I loved it. They would sing and dance for hours. At that time, I attended many church services and began to learn a few words of Spanish, since no one spoke English with me. I had made many friends and they invited me to their homes to eat the famous spicy “mole” sauce—prepared in a hundred different ways. It was like manna in the desert. We had mole enchiladas, mole sandwiches, chicken mole, eggs with mole, and cactus leaves with mole.

The middle class culture here was very different. The girls kissed each other on the cheek, and the guys would kiss the girls on the cheek. Being a single guy, I noticed that sometimes the girls would turn a bit at the last minute and the kiss would land closer to their mouth than the cheek. We laughed about everything and things were definitely lively here.

One day I learned an important lesson. During the worship service, the pastor asked everybody to dance or jump up and down, saying that as their feet were stomping on the ground, it was symbolically crushing the Devil. I didn't feel led to jump that way. Since I was the only one not dancing, the pastor looked right at me and insisted, “Worship the Lord in dance.” But I didn't. So he stared me down, saying, “Some people are rebellious and quenching the Spirit.”

The Lord spoke to my heart that I was a missionary and I was to be an example to the believers. Was I better than they were? Was my way of worshiping superior to the way they were doing it? As I started

jumping up and down, something changed inside of me, and for the rest of my life I have been able to simply submit and not draw attention to myself. I am not better than anybody else. My Christianity is not superior to the way others express their love for Jesus.

In Matthew Henry's commentary on 1 Samuel 15:10, when Saul offered a sacrifice to God, but disobeyed Him, Matthew Henry comments, "It is hard to convince the children of disobedience. But humble, sincere, and conscientious obedience to the will of God, is more pleasing and acceptable to Him than all burnt-offering and sacrifices. God is more glorified and self more denied, by obedience than by sacrifice. It is much easier to bring a bullock or lamb to be burned upon the altar, than to bring every high thought into obedience to God, and to make our will subject to His will. Those are unfit and unworthy to rule over men, who are not willing that God should rule over them."

It's important that I have an obedient and humble spirit. What a great lesson to learn.

I learned another lesson on humility when I was asked to take care of two small boys, five and six years old, while their parents went to Canada for two weeks. In my heart I said to myself, *I'm not called to be a babysitter—don't they understand I'm a missionary?* Again God spoke to my heart and asked me if I was willing to be His servant. I said, "Yes, Lord, my life is Yours to do with as You please." For the next two weeks, I fed these kids the food I was eating, which was boxed artificial soy meat. It tasted terrible but was very nutritious. These two wonderful boys actually ate what I served them, and we would pray together for their parents and for many things. I didn't do a very good job with the laundry, but I did keep the house clean. We made it through those two weeks, but those kids were sure happy to see their parents when they got home.

## ITINERANT PREACHING

By June of 1980 I had to drive to Texas to renew my visa. My first stop was a mountain village in the state of Hidalgo. Some of the locals

invited me to hike up the side of a mountain that was so steep that the villagers planted the coffee beans with their toes, as they leaned against the hill. When we got to the top, one of the villagers climbed a tree and picked a pod of some sort, split it open, and offered me the seeds. I popped one in my mouth and started chewing. The villagers laughed and roared hysterically. To my surprise, the seed was very bitter, and my facial expressions revealed that. Evidently, the seed was a delicacy and you were only supposed to eat the white fuzz on the outside. They thought I was really ignorant, especially because I couldn't communicate and speak very well. Evidently, they had never encountered an American who only spoke English.

While I was in this mountain village, I had decided to read only my Spanish Bible since I could figure out the meaning in English. Although I wasn't fluent in Spanish, it was here that I preached my first message in their language, reading from my Spanish Bible in the third chapter of John. After I stumbled through the reading, I used gestures to try to explain the message. Who knows what they understood, but we had a wonderful time laughing and sweating in this remote, tropical mountaintop.

The next day I drove to Ciudad Valles where it was 100 degrees with 100 percent humidity. I found an evangelical church and I was invited to camp out there under a mango tree behind their sanctuary. Again, I was welcomed into the people's homes and offered to teach at the service that night. We had such wonderful fellowship, laughing all the way into the evening. To this day, I have no idea if they understood anything I said, but we sure had a good time. The next day I was requested to speak at one of their missions and once again, we had a fabulous time of companionship together.

In the morning I drove to Tampico on the Gulf Coast in the state of Veracruz. I drove around trying to find an evangelical church, but could find none. About six o'clock that evening, I saw two young people carrying Bibles, which was a rare thing to see in Mexico. I pulled over and asked them where they were going, and they told me

about a Bible study, where one more time I was able to share and teach the Bible. The next day they took me to the Assembly of God church, where I met the pastor, and by that evening I taught there as well. For twenty-two days, I preached in twenty-one different cities or towns without having a single contact beforehand. I guess they liked this American who didn't speak Spanish all that well, who was living in his car with nothing but a smile and God's love to share.

In time I actually started speaking Spanish. I had learned as a small child would—by listening and repeating what I heard. I had the advantage of using a limited vocabulary focused on the Bible, words which were much easier to remember, since I was familiar with that. I could comfortably talk about the Bible, but when I went into the store, I had to point at what I wanted. I still didn't know some of the common words.

After three months on the road, I wound up back in Mexico City. Someone gave me the name of a pastor and I found his church on the north side of the city. He invited me to teach in their Bible school that had about twenty students. At that time, less than half of one percent of the people in Mexico were Bible-believing Christians. But I felt comfortable here since this church was very similar to the others I had visited along the way. The morning worship service went on for four hours and then we ate together. The evening service lasted another four hours. Every Friday we would have an all-night prayer meeting, ending at 7:00 a.m. on Saturday. We would pray through the night, sometimes singing, sometimes kneeling, and always drinking hot chocolate. One night at 3:00 a.m. a man was banging on the church door and when I opened it, all he had in front of himself was a piece of cardboard. He had been robbed and stripped naked. We gave him some clothes, invited him to join us, and then we continued right on praying.

## HOME AND HOSPITALITY

This is where I moved out of my van and began to live with the Venegas family of twelve. Granddad taught me how to eat the hottest



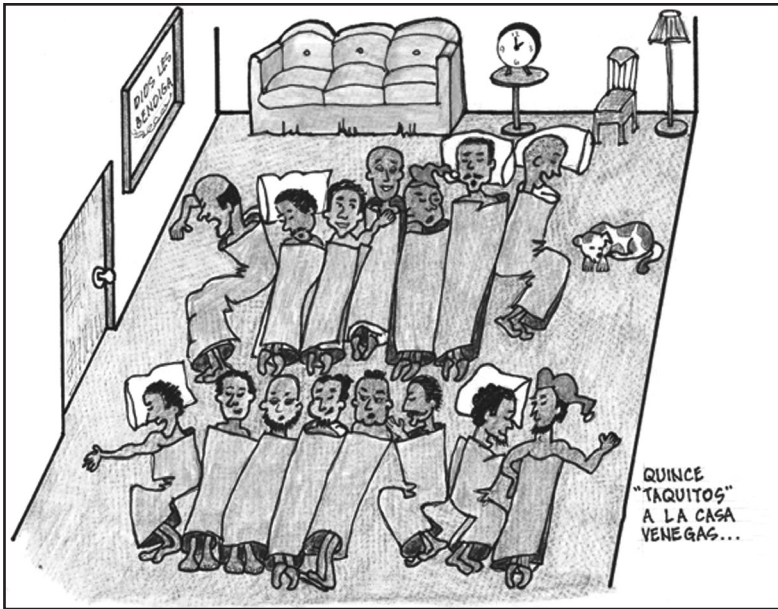
chili peppers I have ever known. He didn't have any teeth and I'm sure his gums were on fire. The Venegas family had a round table in their kitchen, and anytime someone would visit, they would sit at that table and be fed a meal. In America, I grew up eating dinner with my family at a dinnertable. But if somebody knocked on the door while we were eating, we would ask them to come back after dinner. This type of behavior would have been an insult in the Mexican culture. I learned the joy of sharing food and fellowship with whomever the Lord brought by the house at any time. They have a saying in Mexico: if more people come to eat than what was planned, and the food runs low, then just add more water to the pot of beans.

First John 3:17-18 says, "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

Romans 12:10, 13, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality."

Galatians 6:10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

Hospitality was a way of life in the Venegas home. Christians who came from out of town always had a place to stay. One time a team of twelve students came to visit and minister for two weeks and somehow we all fit in the four-bedroom house. Another time fifteen Christian men arrived from Guatemala and we slept on the floor like a pan of taquitos, rolled up in blankets lying next to each other. Here life was so different, the values so wonderful, and I wanted to become one of them.



## CRUSADES AND OUTREACHES IN MEXICO

The Lord was teaching me so many lessons. In the spring of 1981, I was invited to join the Billy Graham evangelistic team to help set up his Mexico City crusade. I became friends with Norm Mydske, the Latin American crusade director, as we traveled to the churches showing movies and promoting the event. I had the privilege to eat breakfast with Mr. Graham, along with a handful of other missionaries, and I was able to meet him and hear firsthand his passion to reach people for Christ.

After all this preparation, when Billy Graham finally arrived at the airport, the government officials took away the permit that was obtained for Billy to preach in Plaza Mexico, which was the largest bullring in the city. He ended up preaching in a small wrestling arena, where there were more people outside listening than inside. Out of all the crusades in the world that the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association had at the time, one of the elder team members remarked that it was the worst crusade ever. I mention this because I knew that the local

pastors had “appropriated unto themselves” funds from the ministry. And as I sat in the organizational meetings with the city pastors, it was obvious to see Satan’s stronghold on the city, the country, and the existing evangelical churches at the time.

My days of working with the established evangelical churches were soon to change. At this time in my life, I was gifted with incredible spiritual and physical energy. I didn’t need to eat or sleep much. The Lord strengthened me to travel, first around the city, then around the country, and soon deep into Central America. The Lord desired to break the stronghold that the evil one has had on Mexico for thousands of years. To do this, He would begin to perform spiritual miracles and healings straight from the book of Acts. The powers of darkness needed to be broken in order for a fresh work of the Spirit to begin among the people.

Zechariah 12:10 states, “Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David.” Jesus was putting in our hearts, now collectively, a desire to pray and intercede for Mexico.

Here is an excerpt from a letter I wrote to my friends on October 1, 1981:

“The fall semester is underway here at the Bible school, as I teach a double class load of five Bible books and a class on Greek word studies. The school continues to expand with fifteen new students this semester. Many have a very strong hunger for God and each day, as I arrive at 6:00 in the morning in the chapel, I find twenty to thirty students already on their knees.”

It is important to understand what was happening politically at this time. In Central America, Nicaragua had become a communist country, joining Cuba as a Soviet force against the United States in the Cold War. There was a revolutionary war going on in El Salvador, and in Guatemala guerrilla warfare was killing thousands. In Mexico,

95 percent of university students were thrilled at the prospect that communism was to bring equality to all men and food for the poor. The schools, from elementary through high school, taught the evils of Yankee imperialism and the hope that socialism had promised. Thirty years later, looking back, Mexico City has been governed by socialistic left-wing mayors, the result of the generation that devoured socialistic doctrine in the 70s and 80s.

It was during this time that a forty-five-year-old refugee from the war-torn country of El Salvador stayed for a while at the Venegas home and told us firsthand of the horrors that she faced in her homeland. The guerrilla fighters came to their house, forced the children to take off their clothes, then balled up the garments and threw them on the roof, and set fire to the house. Her girls were not raped, but her neighbor's girls were and their mother was beheaded. I saw the picture of this lady lying in a pool of blood, where a solitary candle burned at her feet. This picture has haunted me, because I understood that the chief element of communism was to eliminate the people's belief in God. I began to pray for the door to open to share the gospel in those villages.

### AN OPEN DOOR

Not long after this, one of the students from Bible school, David Espinosa, invited me to Central America to join him in an evangelistic outreach in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Riding on the back of a motorcycle, David took me to a guerrilla-controlled village in El Salvador. I will never forget the fear I saw on the people's faces. But oh, how happy they were to hear that Jesus Christ is not only alive, but He offers hope for the future. I've always felt called to go where the need is greatest and the people are the most open. This trip would mark a turning point in the ministry where God had called me.

Back in Honduras, the first night of the evangelistic outreach, the place was packed and I gave the most powerful message of my entire life. I shared that Jesus was coming back soon, and that what was going on around them in El Salvador and Guatemala, God had allowed to transpire to wake them up to the spiritual reality. I sensed the anointing of

the Holy Spirit as I had never felt before as I boldly proclaimed, “God is going to shake this city with an earthquake.” I boldly declared that some people in the audience were not on good terms with God, had sin in their lives, and they needed to come forward to be born again by the Spirit of God. But nobody came forward. I waited...and waited some more. Then I said, “I want to lead you in a prayer to the living God.” As people’s heads were bowed and eyes were closed, I asked them to raise their hand if anybody wanted to receive Christ. Again no response. We prayed some more and then I asked if there was anybody who wanted to rededicate their life to the Lord, to raise their hand. Nobody moved, nobody responded. That was it. Everybody went home for the night.

When we got back to David’s family’s house, I was very discouraged. Here I was, my first time in Central America, with so many people hearing the gospel for the first time and not a single person responded. We all prayed and then went to sleep that night. And then out of nowhere the house began to shake. At about two o’clock that morning, a very strong earthquake shook the capital city of Tegucigalpa. We all ran out of the house, fearing it would collapse. The entire family was really shaken up.

The next night at the outreach, so many people had come that there was standing room only in the auditorium. People were standing outside the windows and standing out in the courtyard. The message that night wasn’t nearly as good, and I don’t even remember what I taught. But I do remember that when I gave an invitation to come forward to receive God’s forgiveness and to accept Him as Savior, people literally ran down to the front to get saved.

I sensed that God wanted to do something more. I told the people that Jesus Christ Himself was there and that even as He had saved and healed people 2,000 years ago, He would do the same that night. I asked if anyone wanted to be touched and healed by the living Christ, who was there in our midst, and immediately, a line of about 100 people formed to receive prayer for healing. I clearly remember the

first man in line, a tall gentleman wearing a white shirt with short, curly black hair. I asked what he wanted to be healed of and he told me hemorrhoids. I prayed for him and he started weeping. I asked him what happened, and he told me he was healed. I asked him how he knew. He said he was a doctor and knew that the swelling disappeared instantly as we were praying.

I went on praying for each person in that line, and the doctor stood by me to check to see if they were indeed healed or not. As far as he could tell, all those that requested healing were made well that very night by the power of God. The Lord is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He has not changed since the days of the book of Acts. The only thing that has changed is placing more belief in medicines and doctors rather than placing our faith in Him.

Of course the medical profession is used by God to heal the sick, but if a person has no access to doctors or medicine, they find it easier to trust the Lord for a miracle. Faith can be so much stronger when there is a dire lack or strong need. It's like having your refrigerator filled with food and praying that God would multiply the loaves of bread on your countertop. But if you are preaching in a poor, remote village, and the people ask for God to give them their daily bread, He may very well do a miracle and cause a sack of corn to fall off the back of a truck right in front of your shack. Man's extremities are God's opportunities. The Lord leads us to the end of our rope and then says...“LET GO.”

From Tegucigalpa, Honduras, I then traveled to San Pedro Sula, which today has the highest murder rate of any city in the world. One of my students, Odin Garcia, was from this area and had arranged for me to do an outreach in his town with thirty local pastors attending. I remember staying in one pastor's house. He had a mango tree with mangoes as large as eighteen inches. While enjoying one of these delicious mangoes, the Lord spoke to my heart about the great fruit awaiting those individuals who walk by faith and not by sight.

Indeed, on that hot, windy night we were to see great fruit by the power of the Holy Spirit. Once again, people were miraculously healed, and some were completely surprised when God healed them, meaning it wasn't even a product of their own faith. One lady with chronic back pain asked for prayer. Tears streamed down her face as she shared how God healed her. I asked her what caused her the most pain, and she responded that standing up slowly from a chair was excruciating. So I asked her to sit in a chair and stand up slowly. As she stood, I asked her if she felt any pain and she said, "My back is great... but my legs are shaking."

Finally, we went to the high-security prison there. Honduran prisons are like a city within a city. People can wear their own clothes and cook their own food. Peace treaties were formed between the prisoners in the days before Internet and cell phones, because they were so isolated. I was escorted to the area where they held the most violent criminals, and I met the kingpin of the Honduran Mafia. The Honduran criminal boss was a large man and dressed very nicely. He sat quietly and respectfully as he listened to my story. When I shared about how Jesus came into my life and how He made me a new person, this man asked me if it was possible for God to forgive a person like him. I grabbed him by the shoulders and said, "Absolutely." This big, tough guy began to weep, and as tears flowed down his cheeks, he accepted Christ's forgiveness for the bad things he had done. Oh what joy was in that prison when I walked out. When I get to heaven, I'm anxious to hear this man's story. I know beyond a shadow of a doubt God did something miraculous that afternoon.

"Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, 'The LORD has done great things for them.'" (Psalm 126:2).





## CHAPTER 7

# A NEW NAME AND THE BIRTH OF A MOVEMENT

“I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house. I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them” (Isaiah 42:6-9).

Although this prophecy was concerning the Messiah, Jesus gave this Scripture to me on the night of the earthquake in Honduras. And the next day, He began to make this very Scripture come to life.

### A NEW NAME

In the book of Genesis we read how God changed Jacob’s name to Israel, which means “ruled by God.” Jacob was a man who relied upon his own strength, but God had to teach him to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord all night, and when morning came he was a broken man. He realized the only way he could be blessed was to hold on to God for dear life. God had touched Jacob’s hip and now he was a crippled man. But he declared, “I’m not letting go until Your blessing comes.” When God fulfilled His promises, Jacob could not take credit for what God had done, but simply gave all the glory to the Lord, for He alone is worthy to be praised.

Jesus changed Saul’s name to Paul, temporarily blinded him, and left him with a thorn in his flesh to teach him the same lesson. We cannot, under any circumstance, think that there is some goodness in us, or that

the ministry we do is a little better, or we have more faith or our commitment is stronger than anybody else. God works in spite of us. We simply show up and He does the work for His honor and recognition.

I returned to Mexico City from Central America and began the process to legally change my name to Juan Domingo and apply for Mexican citizenship. The Mexican people couldn't pronounce the name John Lilley, and I no longer wanted to be seen as an outsider. I had the dark eyes and dark hair, and my Spanish had a bit of a Central American accent, so I didn't sound like a gringo any more.

I had previously renounced my American citizenship by filling out paperwork with a lawyer who guaranteed me Mexican citizenship. But after taking \$3,000, all I was left with was a Mexican work visa. Later, some believers from a small mountain village proudly gave me a Mexican birth certificate showing my birth date and my new name. I appreciated their efforts, but I have always tried to do things legally. It requires extra work, and sometimes it seems impossible to work through the corrupt legal system, but Jesus will always provide as we trust in Him and wait for His perfect timing. In this case, by the time I finally obtained my Mexican citizenship, the laws had changed and I no longer needed to renounce my American naturalization. Later it would prove fruitful so my children could also be dual citizens. Father always knows best.

### THE MOVE OF THE SPIRIT

Returning to the church we were helping in Mexico City, an eighteen-year-old girl named Carmelita was brought to us. When we prayed for her, she growled with a deep manlike voice, writhing on the ground with superhuman strength, even as she was being held down by six people. She could even read the minds of those praying for her, revealing their secret sins. After hours of prayer, the power of God overcame the power of darkness and this girl was set free. She then took us to her house where she brought out all of her satanic worship and occult books and we burned them all.

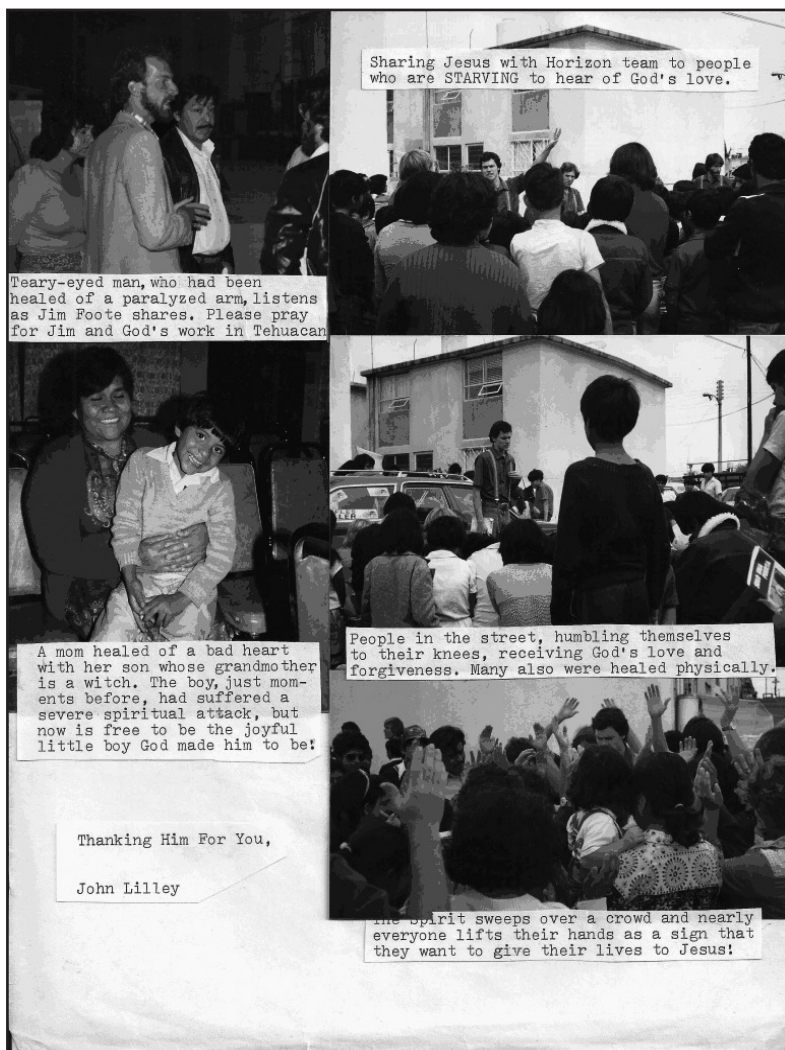
God's Spirit was moving. It seemed overnight that I was being asked to speak all over Mexico City and in the surrounding areas. A new church was starting in a wealthy area, and after I shared the message, I gave an invitation and over 100 people came forward for prayer and healing. It was a thrill to see the Lord heal many from all different backgrounds and fill them with His Spirit. Soon after, the fellowship purchased a large property in Calacoaya, which grew to be one of the biggest churches in Mexico City.

I was requested to speak at another church that was taking place in a restaurant in an upscale neighborhood on the south side of the city. We had to vacate the restaurant by noon on that Sunday morning, so after the message, we didn't have time to wait on the Lord to perhaps receive a word of knowledge or for God to heal. All we had time for was a short prayer. As we prayed, I said if there was anybody there that was sick, they should lay hands on themselves wherever they needed a healing touch. At the end of the prayer, a twelve-year-old girl sobbed uncontrollably. I went to her and asked her what was wrong. Without another word, she walked to the front of the restaurant with her Bible, covered one eye and began reading. She said, "Those of you who know me, know I was born completely blind in my right eye. And now I can read the Bible perfectly." The crowd roared. It was no wonder she was weeping for joy.

On the northern edge of the city called Ciudad Azteca, as I was teaching at a church, a huge lightning storm struck. The electricity went out and it was pitch-black. Without a sound system, I continued teaching. It was a very special evening as the Lord healed many sick people and filled twelve children with the Holy Spirit who began to weep and to speak in new languages. I've always found little ones to be the people most open to the work of the Holy Spirit, as they exercise their child-like faith. The pastor there asked me to take over his church and be the head pastor, but I knew that new wine has to go into new wineskins, and I didn't feel cut out to be a pastor at the time.

Two days later, twelve students arrived from the School of Evangelism from San Diego. I sensed that the Lord wanted to do something new.

Before going out to the streets to share the Lord, we prayed for two days and waited upon the Spirit. God did an amazing work in all of our lives. Various individuals shared prophecies that would come true in the years to come. A new Jesus movement was being born. Since then, people from that room have gone out all over the world preaching the gospel.



John Bonner would become my assistant pastor, marry a gal on our staff, and later plant a church and build the Calvary Chapel Bible College in the nation of Peru. Jim Foote would go on to plant a church in Tehuacan, Puebla and later pastor the church in Cuernavaca, Morelos. Thomas Shockey would later move to the city of Ensenada in Baja, start an orphanage and play a key role in the church we would plant fifteen years later. Many missionaries from that group would go around the world. A year after our gathering, a team member, David Sylvester, visited us, married the daughter of a Mexican missionary, and later moved to England to build the Bible College in the city of York.

We received specific prophecies concerning a new day coming for Mexico. This proved to be true when the Mexican Constitution was changed to allow public preaching of the gospel which, at the time, was strictly prohibited. We prayed for the famous musicians, Yuri and Lupita Delessio, and they have since then become Christians, with Yuri becoming a part of our Festival of Life evangelistic team years later. We prayed that the gospel would be preached on the central plaza in front of the national cathedral in downtown Mexico City; this also became a reality.

A new movement of God's Spirit had been born. Something fresh, something powerful, something beautiful had started, as we simply loved the people and taught them the Word in a non-religious, systematic fashion. I felt like everything in Mexican history prior to this time was perfect preparation for the people to be open and receptive to the work of the Holy Spirit through the teaching of God's Word. It was new wine for a new generation, and now we can see clearly how God wanted to do a new work.

### **STREET PREACHING WITH THE TEAM**

After that prayer meeting, something new and so wonderful was birthed. We went out to preach on the steps leading up to the Basilica of Guadalupe, the center of Mexican religious worship. Then we went to a city park near the subway stop of Tacuba. To gather a crowd,



our team of sixteen young people dressed in green shirts formed a line to snake around the park, each one making a different machine sound. Thomas Shockey, the leader, could perfectly imitate a police siren. Everybody was fascinated and overjoyed to see these crazy Americans. Once we performed a gospel drama presentation in Spanish to a group of 200 to 300 people. It was filled with humor and heartwarming emotion that captivated the audience. The story culminated as Jesus was crucified, and then broke the chains of death by arising from the dead and wiping out the demon hordes.

The quality of the drama was so good that people were actually brought to tears. I then proceeded to walk out with my open Bible and declare with urgency the need to change direction and be born again. As I preached, a group of four or five drunks started yelling, declaring that we didn't believe in the Virgin Mary. They said they were going to kill us. Right at this time, thirty or so of the crowd had come forward to receive Christ publicly and turn from their sin. They locked arm in arm to stop these enemies of the gospel, but it was just a matter of

time before a riot ensued. I felt a supernatural boldness come over me, and I told the crowd to let the drunks through and kill me, even as they had murdered Jesus. At that moment I prayed and the words to an old song popped into my mind...“Slip out the back, Jack.”

So that’s exactly what I did. We slipped out of the crowd and hurried across a pedestrian overpass, looking back to watch the police break up the riot and arrest those drunks. This fiasco didn’t stop us but only encouraged us to continue preaching the gospel in parks, plazas and schools all over the city.

Over the next several days, we started evangelizing at an open air street market in the Aztec city neighborhood. Again, dozens of people received the Lord and many were healed of illnesses. Afterwards mothers and grandmothers hurried back home bringing their sick relatives to us so we could pray for them. Jesus did many extraordinary miracles, confirming that the message of the gospel we were preaching was true.

Subsequently we traveled four hours south of Mexico City to Tehuacan, Puebla, a town famous for its mineral water. At the time this city of 100,000 people was a hub for the many different indigenous communities that came from the surrounding mountain villages, speaking different Indian languages.

We set up in the Central Park in front of the mayor’s office. Jim Foote from San Diego, California had moved down there as a missionary and had organized the outreach. A huge crowd gathered, from curiosity seekers, to workers eating their lunch in the park, to indigenous people who didn’t understand Spanish. By using the drama presentation we had acted out before, we could share the message of the cross to this diverse crowd. Just as before, there was a huge response as we gave invitation after invitation, as new people kept coming into the park. Once again the Lord, following His sovereign desire, began to heal people of their physical infirmities. And again, people would rush home only to return bringing their sick relatives back to the park. It was an amazing time and the local newspaper wrote us up on the front



page. As a result, the organizers of the huge Good Friday Catholic recreation production, which every year was performed outside of the city, asked me to come and speak to the multitudes that would attend the festival a month later.

### GOD'S AMAZING POWER MANIFESTED

After the team left, the Lord continued to open doors for me to share the good news and pray for the sick. I went for a few days to rest up in the hills near a town called Las Pilaes, but wouldn't you know it, the three churches in the town got together for an open air meeting to share the gospel, so I stayed just because I wanted to seek the Lord.

That same morning I went to the shack of the town drunk, and seeing his beaten wife and dirty, half-naked and starving children who had bloated stomachs, I thanked God I was able to grow up and be raised by a loving mother. I thanked Jesus I didn't have to search for scraps of food to feed myself. As we preached there in the open cornfield, the town drunk not only came but he even prayed, weeping that God would restore his family. Right at the same time, a Pentecostal pastor was healed of gastritis. He took his glasses off after he felt a burning heat in his eyes and found that he could see clearly. And incredibly a man felt his hernia go away as we were praying. I had never seen anyone so happy. Not only that, but his wife was healed of her back and chest pain instantaneously. Another man felt the sharp pains in his back disappear and a child's fever dissipated after prayer. All evidence of God's love for a lost world. God's amazing power was being manifested.

On Good Friday, we returned to the small town near Tehuacan, Puebla, where we had been asked to preach the gospel during a religious event. As was their custom on Good Friday, a man had himself beaten and crucified (with ropes, and not nails). I was warned that I would be killed if I shared the message of Jesus as being the only way to God. The only reason I was invited was because of the radical things that happened in Tehuacan the month earlier. So, as far as we knew, this was the first time the Bible had been preached during this renowned religious event here in the country of Mexico.



I was in awe as I stood on the front steps of the Municipal Palace government building; the sight was amazing. Some 10,000 people crowded into the downtown square. The crowd was roped off for fifty yards around me and I noticed people even on the rooftops and in the trees. As I was introduced and walked out with a big Catholic Bible stuck under my arm, time seemed to stand still. A hush grew over the crowd as I parted the gold leaf pages. Typically, their celebration ended with Jesus on the cross. Indeed, in the traditional churches, Jesus is always viewed as dead on the cross or seen in a glass tomb. The Virgin Mary is portrayed as the living mediator to bring the people to God.

Knowing I was about to say something radical, I took a deep breath to address the multitude. “The true message of the Bible doesn’t end with the crucifixion,” I began, “for if Christ didn’t rise from dead, we would be lost without any hope whatsoever. Seeing that He has risen victoriously,” I continued, “we now have available, through faith in His finished work, the power to turn away from a life of self-centeredness and to be born again into a life full of joy, hope and purpose.”

At this point I noticed the religious leader making his way through the crowd to stop me. I decided to see if indeed God was working by declaring, “You must make a public decision right here and right now to live in sin or live for God, to reject Christ or receive Him and live for Him for the rest of your life.” I told them of their need to find a Bible-teaching church to grow in Jesus. I thought maybe ten to fifteen people at most would have the courage to make a public stand for Jesus, which would permit me more time to share with those who had responded.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the religious leader about to take the microphone away. As he got about ten feet away from me, we noticed hundreds of people start lifting their hands to receive the Lord. So he had no choice but to back off and let me continue. I could only see the first few rows of people, but John Bonner, out in the crowd, estimated that nearly 1,000 people had felt God’s Spirit of love and made a decision for Christ. God’s love was manifested.

In the next few days, Jim Foote was living in Tehuacan at the time, and began a church there to minister to all those people. Weeks later, Jim Hesterly, the man God had used to teach me about spiritual gifts, had arrived. We were invited to share in several churches there in Mexico City. At the Balbuena church, God continued to prove His love to people in a real way. A lady totally deaf in her left ear felt a pop as we prayed and her hearing was restored to normal. A young lady, about twenty-five, also totally deaf in one ear, said she felt something like a ball of cotton leave her ear and she could hear perfectly when we tested it. Wow! Isn't Jesus wonderful? People that night were rejoicing to the max.

A small tumor on a girl's left eyelid actually disappeared right before our eyes. A man with two painfully bad ankles was able to jump up and down without pain. A lady and a man had rashes go away as they just worshiped the Lord. A girl's infection was healed and twenty others testified that they had been healed of various ailments. A twelve-year-old boy who had mental problems, and had been paralyzed from the waist down, stood up from his wheelchair as strength and feeling returned to his legs. His mom was just blown away at what God had done.

“And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen” (John 21:25).

## CHAPTER 8

# THE MIRACLE WAREHOUSE: GARBAGE TO GLORY

Through my walk with the Lord, I would always think of my mom. I had written a poem to her on July 16, 1982.

### **Running the Race**

Bang. And you're off  
streaking down the track  
your eyes set on Jesus  
never lookin' back.

Your energy focused  
your body sailing  
speeding by faith  
in His love unfailing.

Coming through the turn  
your eyes hit the line  
power fills your body  
you're coming from behind.

Shoulder to shoulder  
coming down to the tape  
you hurl yourself forward  
and you have won the race.

Falling to your knees  
you look to the sky  
glory to God  
is all you can cry.

## NEW WINE—NEW WINESKIN

A new day was dawning. New wine was being poured out from heaven and it was time for a new wineskin to capture the fresh new work that Jesus was beginning.

It was 1982 and a missionary friend from Texas, Paul Flotho, visited me when I lived at the Venegas house. Seeing that I was desperately ill, he told me to jump into his van and he drove fifteen hours to his home in Harlingen, Texas, just on the other side of the border.

I didn't know what was wrong with me. Thirty years later, I would finally learn that I had a rare brain disease that would affect various organs. At the time, I was confused, had headaches and physically felt very weak. Back then this disease had not yet been discovered, but the Lord would lead me to get better and strong enough to fulfill His plan for my life. I rested at the peaceful home of my friends, Paul and Mary, there on the Texas border.

One day as I stumbled around their house in a fog, I decided to walk to the corner market to buy a gallon of milk for my cereal. As I meandered, staring into the big trees swaying in the summer breeze, I looked to the right and saw a small red brick office building. God spoke to my heart and asked me to pray for the sick people in that building. I thought I was losing my mind, and I kept walking to the store. On the way back to the house, however, I was intrigued again by this red brick building, so I walked over. I noticed a tiny sign in the window that said, "Fellowship Baptist Church." I poked my head inside the door and a tall gentleman in a suit (who would later be a supporter of our ministry) greeted me. He invited me to the Bible study that night. I thought, *Could it be that the Lord had indeed spoken to me?*

After the evening service, I met the pastor, Ron Corzine. He looked at me kind of funny because I came to a Baptist church in the Bible Belt in flip-flops and shorts, completely inappropriate attire. But he listened intently as I shared a testimony of how God was working in my life. He invited me to preach that Sunday night to his church of

approximately twenty to twenty-five people. Since I hadn't brought any clothes to Texas, my friend Paul lent me a suit and shoes, both two sizes too big. He was also kind enough to lend me some suspenders to keep my pants from falling down. I'm sure people were chuckling that Sunday night when they saw me wearing Bozo clown shoes and an oversized suit.

The Bible study I taught that night wasn't very good since I wasn't thinking very clearly. At the end of the message, God gave me a vision of a man sawing lumber with his left hand and I saw a circle around his left elbow. I spoke out that God was healing somebody who had been sawing and had an injured left elbow. A man stood up, looking around as if to say, "How did he know?" And as he flexed his arm, he realized the pain was completely gone. I received a word of knowledge about a boy with a sprained ankle and I spoke out that God was healing somebody's ankle. As soon as I said it, a twelve-year-old boy stood up without his crutches, completely healed, jumping up and down to prove it. I shared that God was touching somebody's back. Not only was this thirty-year-old lady healed of chronic back pain, but when I saw her ten years later, she told me she hadn't had one day of pain since the first day God had touched her. The final word of knowledge that came to me was the word "pancreas." Now I didn't know exactly what a pancreas was or what it did, but I was obedient to the moving of the Spirit. As I insisted that somebody was being healed of a pancreas problem, nobody stood up. I insisted three times more, but nobody responded.

I was bummed out and walked back to the house feeling depressed, dejected, confused and sad. At the door, Mary asked me how it went. I told her it went okay, but I was confused when nobody responded to the problem of the pancreas. She stared at me for a moment and exclaimed, "You know, that is YOUR problem." She said her mother had hypoglycemia or low blood sugar caused by a poor functioning pancreas. It all made sense. That's why I was feeling so sick. I broke out in joy and realized that God was helping me get my health back to

serve Him. I went on a hypoglycemic diet and my strength returned and I was able to go strong for another thirty years.

The little Baptist church was thrilled. It turned out that they had heard about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but had not yet experienced this miraculous power in their church. God manifested His power in such a way that their attendance took off, eventually growing to over 1500 people. They were so grateful for the work God had done in their midst that night that they gave me a check matching the amount of their entire church building project. What a blessing for the ministry. We used it to buy printing presses for Christian literature in Mexico.

However, as I returned to Mexico City, I realized that all of my labor had been spent building on other people's foundations, some of which had collapsed through sin in the leadership. This simply broke my heart. I felt my days of working with the existing evangelical churches were over, and it was time to start a new work, led by God's Spirit. Our prayer was that Jesus would create a whole new wineskin, a fellowship that would be founded on simply teaching the Word and loving people into the kingdom. I was still working on getting my strength back when God shared this Scripture with me.

“Then I said, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for naught, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God.

“And now, says the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength.

“And he said, It is a light thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give you for a light to the Gentiles, that you may be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

“Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despises, to him whom the nation abhors, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose you.

“Thus says the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard you, and in a day of salvation have I helped you: and I will preserve you, and give you for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth” (Isaiah 49:4-8).

Through this messianic text, I felt that Jesus had been preparing me for something new. The Lord had given me a fresh word and I returned to Mexico City with an excitement to see something new and dynamic from the Lord. Thomas Shockey was moving to Mexico, so I needed to find a place to use as an outreach center. But as I began to look, God made it clear in my heart not to look or tell anybody that I even wanted to move. For at that time nobody in the entire country knew my need. Only our Father in heaven.

### A PLACE OF OUR OWN

In the beginning, I asked God for a two-bedroom house to start home Bible studies. However, after waiting daily for a long time, I upped the ante to six bedrooms. The only thing I really needed concerning the building was that it be near a Metro subway station, where the entire population of seventeen million people could have quick and easy access at the cost of two cents at the time, from anywhere in the city. A week later, a Christian man came by the house where I was living. He asked the father of the family, Oscar, if he knew of someone who would be interested in buying his house to convert into a church. The roof had fallen in on part of the duplex, but it was only 100 yards from a Metro station. It seemed too good to be true, and with the devaluation of the peso, the \$60,000 property was being sold for only \$15,000.

In my mind, this was the perfect area. Being in a bad part of town, there were drunks and destitute people sleeping out on the sidewalk.

Jesus did not go to the righteous, but He ministered to the sinners. With the \$15,000 I had received when my grandmother passed away, I began the process of purchasing this property. However, in this process, I was to learn a lesson that would be incredibly important for the future of the ministry.

I had given the seller a \$3,000 down payment, but after we ran a title search, we discovered that the property was in probate and would go to his eight children. But only seven wanted to sell. I was so disillusioned. Was this not the Lord leading us to the perfect spot to start our new ministry? Was this not God's provision?

The seller had spent the \$3,000 down payment, so he gave me an old used car in exchange. The Lord was showing me that I needed to learn real estate law. I needed to know how to do things in Mexico without a lawyer because they cannot always be trusted, and there were no escrow companies at the time. The Lord did teach us and we're blessed to be able to purchase many properties all over the country without ever losing a nickel again. We did our own title searches, which saved us hundreds of thousands of dollars, and we were able to steer clear of the rampant real estate fraud. Plus, we were always able to negotiate unbelievable terms and financing, as I told prospective sellers about my first unfortunate experience. The sellers understood why I was so rigid in my real estate negotiation.

So there I was back with the Venegas family with one missionary already living with us and the other arriving the next week. I distinctively remember sitting at the kitchen table feeling trapped, determined not to tell anyone of our need. I was cutting a thin slice of beef when there was a knock on the kitchen door. This visitor sat down at the table and asked if I knew anybody interested in renting a warehouse there in the neighborhood. Inside I was jumping up and down and screaming for joy at the prospect of God's provision. My first thought was to leave my lunch on the table and run off to see the property. But I had to be broken once again by the Lord. So I asked Jesus that if this warehouse was for us, that He would allow me to finish my lunch, without the property being rented to someone else.



It turned out that Jesus had something far better planned than what I had envisioned. The Lord showed us that He needed a much larger place to minister to all the people He wanted to reach in Mexico City. But more importantly, He put us in a middle-class neighborhood where we were able to reach a much wider spectrum of people for the Lord.

The poor people in the social castes during this time were honored to visit a nice restaurant in a good area of the city. However, the middle and upper class would never venture into one of the blighted, poor neighborhoods where we had been looking at property. My desire to reach the poor multitudes needed to be focused in an area where all the social classes could come and feel comfortable.

Again and again God's provision was supernatural. He led us to the perfect area. This Christian friend, who knew nothing of my need, "just happened" to mention a place for rent which "just happened" to be perfectly located fifty yards away from where millions of Mexicans make their pilgrimage to the Virgin of Guadalupe. That's not to mention the twenty-five different buses and Metro subway lines that passed right near the facility. What was the address? 11 Daniel Street. In the Bible, Daniel 11 says that the people that KNOW their God will act valiantly and do great things (verse 32). Once more, the Lord was confirming our ministry of teaching the Word systematically, and our vision statement was to know God and make Him known. We had been waiting for so long and we were extremely blessed to finally begin this new fellowship based upon God's Word and confirmation.

It was a 5,000-square foot warehouse which we were able to remodel using the money that I had brought into Mexico to purchase the other property. We framed five bedrooms out of plywood and used blankets nailed up for doors. We also built a living area with a large kitchen and two bathrooms, and we added offices and a library. To top it off, it had a private racquetball court. All for only \$600 a month to rent.

God's wisdom was amazing. Instead of buying and getting locked into a long-term commitment, we were in a place where we could grow

and move when we needed to. The remaining \$12,000 I had brought into the country was stretched to pay for the remodeling, eight rooms of furniture, a complete kitchen, four office desks, 250 chairs, bookshelves for the library, a sound system for the outreaches, and two months' rent paid in advance.

### A HEAP OF TROUBLE

The warehouse converted nicely into an outreach center and our living accommodations. It didn't have any windows for ventilation or doors out to the street; simply a large rollup steel door that had been used to load trucks when this warehouse was a furniture factory.

However, because this property had been abandoned for a long time, the people in the neighborhood deposited their trash ten feet from the front door. The trash heap grew sometimes to six feet tall and fifteen feet long by the time the weekly dump truck would come to shovel up the garbage. Huge rats had made their home by eating spoiled food. The pungent stench was so unbearable it made grown men gag. Could this indeed be the place to start our first outreach center and church?

We talked to our neighbors across the street about the garbage problem, but they told us that they had tried everything. They had put up a religious statue of Mary, but the people simply put the trash behind the image's back so she wouldn't see it. Somebody had even been killed fighting other neighbors over this garbage dump. My first thought was to chain a vicious dog to the tree by the door, but it could injure a small child. So we prayed to the Lord about what we were supposed to do.

The next time the dump truck came and the city workers started shoveling the tons of garbage that had accumulated, I gathered the team and told them that when the truck left we were going to sanitize the street, the curb and the sidewalk where the trash had been because whenever the truck left, there were still scraps of garbage and a carpet of scum remaining.

We all grabbed mops and brooms. This was an all-day project as we swept and scrubbed that corner to make it the cleanest spot in the city.

As we were scrubbing and cleaning, we noticed that people carrying bags of garbage to dump now walked by and wouldn't dump their garbage at our feet. The neighbors began to ask what we were doing there and why we were cleaning the corner. We shared with them our love for the Mexican people and our desire to have Bible studies so people could get to know Jesus better.

The next day, at five in the morning, we went out while it was still dark only to find that people had thrown bags of garbage in the same spot again while we were asleep. So we decided to bring these bags into our warehouse and put them in several trash barrels that we had purchased. Then we swept it up again. Word got out that there were these crazy Christians who were the happiest people they had ever seen, and they were cleaning up the neighborhood. We were heroes to our immediate neighbors and many came to Christ because of it. It took several weeks of standing on the street corner every day, taking turns with brooms in our hands to make sure that the people understood we were not going anywhere, in spite of some still dumping trash in the middle of the night.

### REACHING THE NEIGHBORS

The night came for us to hold our first concert outreach. Pastor Mike MacIntosh traveled from San Diego and we had a band playing in the upstairs portion of the warehouse. We had been preaching in the streets and on the campuses and we passed out flyers that announced we were going to teach out of the Catholic Bible about Jesus coming back. In the book of Acts, the apostle Paul had washed his hands and said he was done preaching to the Jews. He would reach out to the non-Jewish people instead. Likewise, we felt called, not to the evangelical Christians, but to the multitudes that held a form of godliness, but denied the power thereof.

As we were close to the starting time of our outreach, Pastor Mike asked me how many people I thought would come. I said I was hoping for ten to twelve, fully aware of the difficulty a Catholic might have coming into our building. They had been taught that they would be condemned

to hell eternally for setting foot in an evangelical church. Mike's eyes got really big and he asked, "Do you mean we might not have anybody show up?" "No," I reassured him, "I'm sure a few people will come."

The people started showing up late, as was the custom. But they kept coming and coming, until the 250 chairs that we had were all taken. We had drunks and communist infiltrators who wanted to debate our ideologies, but most of the people were those from the neighborhood who had seen the joy of Jesus as we swept that street corner clean. At the invitation to receive Christ, the entire crowd stood to their feet recognizing their need for a Savior. The love of Jesus is what people are dying for around the world, not our theology.

The first Sunday after that, forty people showed up and we were thrilled. Unfortunately, the Catholic priest in our neighborhood reminded the people of the eternal condemnation that awaited them if they set foot in our warehouse. The next Sunday, only eight brave new believers came to the service.

One of them, Panchito, a fourteen-year-old boy, came with his grandmother. He was the first disciple—and thirty years later, he is now the assistant pastor. Two teenagers who lived across the street, Carlitos and Lupita, came to the service, and so did Sylvester, a fifteen-year-old street kid who heard the gospel and eventually moved in with us. A high school student, Herbert, received the Lord when we preached using dramas at his public school. We had Adriana, a business student; Humberto, a flight attendant; and his brother who was in banking. They were always coming to the warehouse to learn more and more about Jesus. Humberto had been healed the day before a planned sinus surgery, and when he went in for the procedure, the pre-op x-ray showed that he no longer needed the surgery. He shared his faith holding the two sets of x-rays in his hands, showing the dates before and after prayer.

Life in the warehouse was quite the spectacle for our team. We had five girls who had rented a house in the neighborhood, while John

Bonner, Thomas Shockey, Kevin, Sylvester and I were all living in our warehouse. You would find us all, at six in the morning, gathered for morning devotion. We would read out of the Bible with a pencil between our teeth to help us with the Spanish pronunciation. We made it a rule that missionaries were not allowed to speak English before 10:00 p.m., even if they didn't know any Spanish. It was amazing how well this worked, and everybody learned to speak really good Spanish rather quickly. I firmly believe speaking the language well is very important.

We held everything in common, like in the book of Acts, but after a while, it didn't work so well. One time when I was gone, a medical doctor had supposedly become a Christian and he decided to do a medical outreach at the warehouse. Everybody collected all the unused medications from their houses and brought them to us. Then the doctor said he had an urgent surgery and needed to borrow my car. He said he would photograph the surgery to show the people what he was doing, so he took my expensive Nikon camera. He also said they wanted to listen to Christian music, so he took my stereo and then took off...but he never came back.

This all happened when I was in California and they called me and told me about my car and possessions. I just laughed and said, "Well, I guess the Lord has a better car for me." When I hung up the phone at my mother's house, she asked what the conversation was about and I told her. She started panicking when I told her about my car being stolen and not having insurance. She couldn't believe that I was smiling and happy. This is one of the many things that would show my wonderful mother that I had, indeed, found contentment and peace in Jesus. Sure enough, I was able to purchase a Mexican-made VW van. I had given away my other one. I had learned not to drive cars with American license plates, which drew unwanted attention.

### "MOTHER OF GOD"

Just a few steps from the door of our warehouse was the famous Calzada de Guadalupe, where the devotedly religious would walk the

final two miles to the world-famous cathedral bearing her name. Some people, in their religious fervor, would travel the last miles on their knees, and some men even crawled with sharp cacti tied to their knees. The indigenous people would be dressed in their native costumes and dance to their god.

The “Mother of God” named Cihuacoatl or Tonantzin (Our Mother), in the Aztec religion, was deeply adored and worshiped. When the Spaniards conquered Mexico, they built churches over the native’s religious sites. In the area where Tonantzin was worshiped in Mexico City, a peasant named Juan Diego had a vision of a dark-skinned mother of God named Guadalupe. He was instructed to build a church on this site, where she was worshiped. Today, this basilica is one of the most visited places of worship on the planet. The logic among the religious here is, “If God is great, how much greater is His mother!”

So Guadalupe is believed to be the intercessor who loves the Mexican people and will bring those who ask her before the Lord God Almighty. This fits right in with the matriarchal society where the mother is the responsible adult while many times the father is unfaithful and negligent. The kind and gentle mother always has time for her children.

I believe this is the reason, in part, for God moving through supernatural healings and miracles. The poor do not study past the elementary school level, and they base “truth” only upon what they have experienced. This culture is much the same as in the days of Jesus. It was truly wonderful to see God do so many miracles during the beginning of our first church in Mexico. Later on, the miracles would change from healings to that of supernatural provision and intervention by the Lord.

“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place” (2 Chronicles 7:14-15).

## CHAPTER 9

# MEXICO IS SHAKEN TO THE CORE

“And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil” (Deuteronomy 11:13-14).

There was a fresh new work of the Spirit. The latter rain, as prophesied in Scripture, was beginning to rain down in Mexico City. It was the dawn of a new day, a time when God would pour out His blessings, much like the huge thunderstorms and downpours that characterize this part of Mexico.

During the first Sunday night Bible study that we launched in the new warehouse church, a ferocious storm broke out and we could hardly hear because of the noisy rain and hail hitting the warehouse roof. It didn't distract us from finishing the Bible study, though when the study was over, we went outside and the ground and the cars were completely dry. The Lord spoke to me that this was a sign that the latter rain of His Spirit was being poured out. Indeed, looking back now, I've seen how God has confirmed with signs and wonders the work He has always wanted to do in Mexico.

### EXPANDING MINISTRY

We held our first pastors conference in 1984 and seventy-nine pastors and Christian workers were challenged to pay the price to travel and stay with us in order to see a modern-day revival in Mexico City. God moved really powerfully in several of the men's lives. Besides modeling expositional biblical teaching, we were able to live out, as an example for the pastors, the reality of street evangelism using music, puppets,

drama and one-on-one sharing. We continued to proclaim the gospel to hundreds of people at outreaches and at the warehouse. In addition, we had three Bible studies every week to teach the core group of thirty believers who were growing strong in the Lord.

During one of the outreaches the film projector broke down, and so instead of seeing a movie, the Holy Spirit anointed a message on end times that had the entire crowd on the edge of their seats. Then on Good Friday we teamed up with several new believers to put on a drama of the “passion of Jesus.” We reenacted Jesus as He was beaten to a pulp, and then slammed up against a coarse, splintered cross, only to destroy death by rising from the dead. After Jesus had risen in the drama presentation, I proceeded to preach the gospel through tears, and thirty people came forward to receive Jesus.

At the back of the group stood a woman weeping. It was my mother, who had come down to Mexico because she was intrigued by the change in her son’s life. In recent years she had been very successful in business, but suddenly everything came crashing down for her. Her second marriage had fallen apart and then her son became a Christian, dropped out of an MBA program, left everything and moved to Mexico in an old Volkswagen bus. She had called me from New York City on a business trip years earlier, telling me that I had ruined her life. She described to me how she hated preachers and despised beggars, and how they were one and the same.

But my mother, as she later told a friend, saw something in me that she would simply do anything to obtain. So there she stood, in an old warehouse in Mexico City, with tears streaming down her cheeks. As I approached her, she simply said, “I’m here to give myself one hundred percent to Jesus Christ.” Oh how the angels must have been singing and dancing in heaven, even as I felt God’s joy overwhelm me to tears.

My mother, Dottie, upon returning to San Francisco, retired and headed back to graduate school to become a Christian counselor. She went on to open a large counseling ministry at a church she attended



in northern San Diego. I owe so much to her as she taught me a good work ethic and the quest for excellence. Later on, when Alzheimer's disease and three cancer battles came into her life, we had the incredible privilege of building her a little granny flat at our home, where she spent the final three years of her life. She then peacefully stepped into heaven on February 24, 2008. She had helped us so much financially in the ministry, and I am looking forward to visiting her heavenly mansion often.

In 1984 we were invited to put on a concert with a Mexican heavy metal band, and share the good news at the large civic auditorium. It was in the area of a second warehouse we had rented by faith, with a missionary living in Netzahuatcoyotl, a very poor area of Mexico City. The 700-seat theater was packed and people lined the aisles as the band played. The rival gangs paraded in and out, with their chains and "punk" outfits. Several times the music had to be stopped as fights broke out in the crowd. I couldn't help but wonder, *Would there be another riot?*

The time came for the message. I could feel the prayers. Looking out over the crowd, I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in an incredible way. After just standing there and not saying a word, I finally said, "You're going to see something really heavy right now; I'm going to talk to God." I prayed, "Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, I ask You to pour out Your Holy Spirit at this very moment." And He did. You could hear a pin drop as I shared the Word and about 300 people raised their hands to receive the Lord. How amazing is that?

There at our new warehouse in Netza, as we called it, we would close off the street and have concert outreaches in this impoverished and violent part of the city. One night, after many responded to the message we shared, we were invited into a house that was used for satanic worship. The power of darkness was fierce, intense wickedness had stained the concrete floors with blood. We told the cult leader that Jesus loved him and that He wanted to forgive him, if he would just turn his life over to the Lord and renounce the works of darkness. He

broke down and wept, and not only received Christ but began a Bible study there in his home. Simply awesome!

Satan was upset as we preached Jesus directly to the people, without any fear whatsoever. So the evil one apparently manifested himself in a desperate attempt to stop what God was doing. We held a concert outreach at the largest theater in Netza to some 2,500 punk rockers, gang members, prostitutes and street people. As we shared from the Word, people began to scream and whistle as the demons tried to stop the message from going out. But suddenly, a group of detractors turned around and walked out of the theater. A heavenly hush fell on that building. Jesus had triumphed majestically once again, and 250 people made a solid decision to follow the Lord. God is so good.

Our fellowship grew at the warehouse and we were able to purchase property in Linda Vista, the northern part of Mexico City, where we moved our church. This was the first evangelical church in this huge upper middle class part of the city. Often people talk about going to a tribe that has never heard the gospel or to a town without a single church. This was an area of over 100,000 people that didn't have a single Bible-teaching fellowship at the time.

We began to hold outreaches in our new area, and we were overjoyed to see the power of God's love. We invited Mike MacIntosh, Chuck Smith and Ricky Ryan to share the gospel. As they preached, Juan, a young man painted with makeup, wearing a black leather jacket and his full "punk" attire, came forward after the first night's concert. The guys counseling him said they were getting "a buzz" off the glue that was hidden under his jacket that he had been sniffing. That was the drug of choice for the poor back in those days. Dozens of people prayed to break the power of sin over their lives, and they were set free. Juan was back the next night, this time to help set up chairs for the concert.

At that year's pastors conference, Pastor Chuck Smith taught and we were blessed with over 500 Mexican pastors in attendance. They

came from all over the country. The very next Sunday one pastor from Guadalajara began putting into practice what he had learned, simply teaching through the Bible to his congregation.

### GOD'S PROTECTION

September 19, 1985 was a day just like any other day. Everyone in the house attended to their daily schedules as usual. That morning, I was sitting on the edge of my bed having my devotional time with the Lord. Sergio Hernandez, a leader in our church, was preparing for an interview that was going to take place at the Pino Suarez office building. At the last moment, Sergio's appointment was moved to another building, but thankfully he was still on time for his meeting. A physician, Gabriel, for some odd reason, overslept and arrived late for his medical practice at Juarez Hospital, where his shift began at 7:00 a.m. Lupita, a new believer from a recent outreach, walked down Lazaro Cardenas Boulevard with her two younger brothers.

Then at 7:19 in the morning it hit... John Bonner and his wife, Pilar's, four-story apartment began to sway, and...boom. Boom. BOOM. The earth began to heave and jolt, violently shaking with an 8.1 magnitude earthquake. The three-story apartment behind the Bonners doubled over. Screams of terror filled the air. The clock stopped at 7:20 a.m.

It's amazing to think about how the Lord seemed to protect us. Just moments before the earthquake hit, Lupita had this dream sensation that she should cross the six-lane boulevard. Arriving halfway across the street, a high-rise suddenly exploded into a mountain of rubble and Lupita watched a mass of pedestrians buried alive.

Gabriel was late for work, hurrying to arrive at the Juarez Hospital. By the time he arrived, the hospital had become a sepulcher for hundreds of beautiful Mexican people. Amazingly, nineteen newborn babies were dug out alive several days later.

Sergio's appointment was switched to another office the day before. The thirty-story Pino Suarez office building where his original

appointment was came crashing down. The Lord had protected everybody in our church. “Though ten thousand fall at your right hand, it will not come upon you,” Psalm 91:7 declares. Though more than 10,000 died and 300,000 were left homeless, the members of our fellowship were spared that day.

Most of the television stations were knocked off the air as the quake leveled antennas and broadcast studios. Over the radio, they tried to calm the multitudes by broadcasting that the earthquake relieved the pressure from the geological fault line and that there would be no more strong earthquakes for a long time.

However, the next night at 7:40 p.m. as darkness covered the terrified city, the second quake hit, this one a 7.9 magnitude. Somehow it felt far stronger than the first quake. Explosions of light filled the sky as surviving transformers crashed. Screams and horrified cries filled the streets. Absolute panic broke out in my neighborhood and throughout the city. Cars lined the middle of my street, as people spent the night locked in their vehicles, shaking with fear. My next-door neighbor had a nervous breakdown and a rash covered her body. More lives were lost; more buildings were destroyed.

At the time, I was teaching through the entire Bible systematically verse by verse, and the text for that Sunday’s message just happened to be Romans 8:28, “For we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose.” There were so many people at that Sunday service that crowds stood five to six people deep to see through the windows we had opened so people could hear the message from outside.

### RED CROSS MINISTRY

After the first quake, we sent out a team with shovels to go through the rubble at a nearby high-rise condominium tower that had collapsed. During my training in Bible school, I had received a certification card from the Red Cross for first aid. Since the card had my picture on it and it was in English, the soldiers thought I was with

the International Red Cross. They waved me through the barricades where I could climb the pile of rubble to look for survivors. We were able to help rescue a family out of the ruins. It was no easy task; a little girl's leg had to be broken to get her out alive. We then took her father, Adolfo, and some of his rescued possessions to a relative's house where we shared Jesus with them. They were incredibly grateful.



We had a Red Cross emblem painted on the side of my white van, and with my credential I began mobilizing resources long before the real Red Cross ever arrived. With this signage on my van, I went into areas that had received no help whatsoever. Because we had already evangelized in many of the impoverished neighborhoods, we were able to coordinate seven vehicles, loaded with doctors, nurses, and food to feed 1,000 people, and to give medicines, blankets, and clothes to many more. Trucks loaded with supplies had just been sitting there waiting for instructions to drive to the greatest need. It was very exciting barking out orders to mobilize this relief aid.

At that time, I had led Carlos, the nephew of the famous opera singer, Placido Domingo, to the Lord. We played basketball together, and Carlos ended up marrying a girl on our staff. His uncle was involved in the earthquake relief and because of that many doors were opened to us to go in and help as many people as we could.

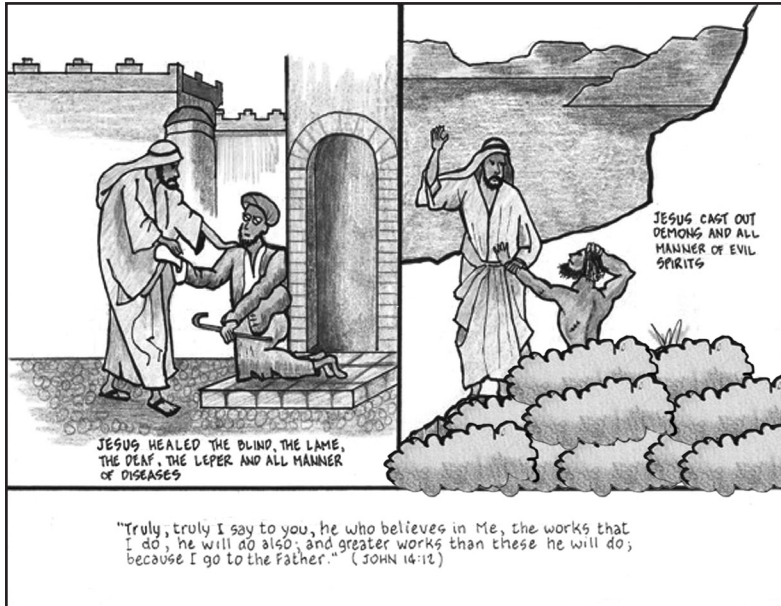
The Lord worked so powerfully. The church was mobilized and 12,000 people came to the Lord as we prayed for broken bodies and broken spirits. I purchased 5,000 complete Bibles, with the dedication letter on the front page signed from the Bishop permitting the Catholic people to read this edition of the Bible. From there, many priests were forced to begin Bible studies as many of the people we ministered to asked for their spiritual leaders to teach them from this book. I was amazed at how God could use a disaster—so terrible like this earthquake—to bring so much good.

### DEMONIC PRESENCE

Before coming to Mexico, I had never seen anyone demon-possessed. And up until this time, I had never seen a “haunted house.” To this day, this is the only one I have ever encountered. It wasn’t really a house, but rather a series of rundown rooms housing entire families in the impoverished slum near downtown Tepito. This is where we prayed for a man named Memo to be set free, and God instantly changed this young man’s countenance and spirit. His mother, Juanita, after seeing the dramatic healing of her son, began sharing the Lord with everyone in the slum. They had known the demon-possessed boy and they too wanted to be freed from the demons that haunted them daily.

“Then they went out to see what had happened, and came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. They also who had seen it told them by what means he who had been demon-possessed was healed...Now the man from whom the demons had departed begged Him that he might be with Him. But Jesus sent him away, saying, ‘Return to your own house, and tell

what great things God has done for you.’ And he went his way and proclaimed throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him” (Luke 8:35-39).



The average person would have had enough common sense never to enter a place like that, yet as we went into the house, we found ten ladies just waiting to receive Jesus. After I prayed with them, I walked into six of the rooms. The little children who lived there told me that they would sit and talk with their dead relatives, their dolls would levitate, talk, and once a doll even tried to strangle one of them. But worst of all, one of the children's mothers reported that there was horrible child abuse committed there and prostitution was taking place. This was the very same neighborhood where the famous Mexican figure of worship was born, called Santa Muerte (Saint Death).

I felt like a triumphant warrior as I walked out of that squalor with one of the dolls and an expensive set of voodoo-cursed statues with pins in the necks. Four hours after I left, a street gang armed with knives,

chains and guns stormed into the same area, but those who received Christ, although robbed, were not harmed in any way. Intense spiritual battle ensues when Jesus sets the captives free. That is why the hope of the world is the local fellowship. There must be a place for these baby lambs to grow. It's what has driven us to plant churches around the country.

Today, one of the patron saints for the drug cartels is this same Santa Muerte. The people believe that this spiritual guide is a friend of the poor, and that rich and poor alike will face him one day. However, this demon has deceived the Mexican people and from 2006 to 2012, 70,000 people have been killed in organized crime drug wars. The lie the enemy has propagated is that illegal drugs only affect those people in the United States who use them. The impoverished multitudes justify working in the industry because they are poor and need the money. What they don't realize is that Satan works all things together for evil, and now drug use has become as common in Mexico as it is on the other side of the border.

In looking back, I can see how the Lord led us to confront the people and places where the most powerful evil forces exist on the planet. There is witchcraft everywhere in the world, but there are areas, as in India and Africa, where Satan works very publicly. In other countries, he deceives people into falling asleep in the light. The demons that have ruled Mexico have used excessive wickedness. The Aztecs would take the most pure, beautiful virgin girl to the top of one of the pyramids. There, as she watched, demonic people would plunge a knife into her chest, and forcefully grab her pulsating heart, thrusting this bloody tissue up high, holding it up to one of their gods. Archaeologists have found that not only was this a common occurrence, but that the girls considered it an honor to be chosen for sacrifice.

Yet in other cultures I can only think of the millions of little babies today that are cut out of their mother's womb and offered up to the god of pleasure and convenience, calling it an abortion. The sad thing is that these little ones have no say in the matter.



So who is to judge that one culture is better than another?

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon  
them a light has shined” (Isaiah 9:2).



## CHAPTER 10

# THE POWER OF EVIL OVERCOME

“Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass” (Psalm 37:4-7).

### A WIFE OF MY OWN

When I first went to Bible school, I felt called to be like Paul the apostle, and be married only to the Lord. I could travel on a moment’s notice without a care in the world. Taking trips around Mexico in my van was such a joy, as Jesus was my very real companion and best friend.

After six years in the ministry, however, I began to feel a desire to be married and share my life with a family of my own. Being a pastor made single life difficult, as I was in a position of spiritual authority and I had to be careful about what I said and did.

For two years I prayed and waited for the Lord to bring me a wife. Little did I know that during those two years, God was working to prepare the woman who would be perfectly suited to serve the Lord at my side. She would have a radical conversion similar to my own, but from a far different background.

Tania Martinez was a troubled youth, who by age fifteen, had a daughter named Angelica. She had problems with the law and eventually wound up in a Mexican prison. It was there that she heard the same message that her sweet praying Christian grandmother had shared with her years before. This time she recognized her own need for a Savior.

Tania helped in the prison by opening the room where a Christian Bible study and worship service was held weekly. Soon she began to be captivated by the worship, specifically when she heard for the first time the song, *Great things the Lord has done, He will restore us from captivity*. That day she gave her heart to Jesus and made the determination to follow the Lord with her whole heart.

Even as I had experienced, she was born again as a whole new person. When she was released from prison, she moved to Mexico City where Tania worked selling insurance. One Sunday, looking for a place to live, she heard the worship from our church and walked in off the street. The Lord spoke quietly to her heart that she had found a pastor and a church to call her home. What she didn't know was that the pastor was going to be her husband and that one day she would move into that very place to live and call it her home.

In the meantime, Tania became very involved in the church. I was thrilled to see someone with the same work ethic that I had, serving the Lord with joy. One day, after we purchased our church property, I walked in to see her painting a floor with oil-based paint that made it hard to breathe. I had invited the men to volunteer for this difficult task, and when I showed up, here was a young lady with the initiative and tenacity to get her hands dirty to get the job done. She just thought of it as simply serving the Lord.

After she finished painting the floor, I invited her to accompany me to the furniture store because I needed to buy new furniture for my house. She agreed and it was a lot of fun picking out the furniture. My way of buying a living room set was to sit in every chair to make sure they were comfortable. So the two of us went around sofa to sofa, testing them out, and finally purchased a modern red sofa set.

By the time we had finished buying the sofa set, it was time to eat, so I asked if she wanted to join me for a couple of tacos. As we were eating delicious steak and chili pepper tacos, tired from a long day, I suddenly blurted out something that I had no idea existed inside of me. I divulged that there was nothing more I would rather do than

to hold her in my arms! No sooner had the words slipped out of my mouth, I quickly backtracked and said something spiritual about her being in the Lord's arms—anything in order to cover my tracks. But it was done. Cupid's arrow had pierced my heart.

Shortly afterwards, I called my pastor and asked him if he would marry us. I asked him to check his calendar and he said he had an opening in two months. We were thrilled at the prospect of joining our lives together to serve the Lord. I feel like I won the lottery in meeting and marrying my wife. We would have our work cut out for us, as we came from two very different cultures and backgrounds, but as the years passed, our love just grew deeper and deeper. We actually got married three times, and each of our three weddings were wonderful. First, we were married in front of a judge and witnesses in Mexico City. Then a few days later we flew to San Diego, where we had a beautiful English ceremony with 300 guests. Finally, we returned to Mexico City for the big one.

It was a time to be remembered. Karl Bryan, a missionary working with us in Netza at the time, volunteered to slaughter four sheep on the night before the big wedding. He said it was heart-wrenching as he took each of their lives, remembering their significance. Starting our new life together, Tania and I traveled south of the city to buy four lambs from a ranch. We brought the sheep back to our house where they mowed our lawn and then fertilized it. Karl had said the night that he slaughtered the sheep, they did so willingly, unresisting as he prepared them for the festive Mexican meal. We dug a huge hole, four feet deep and four feet wide in our backyard. We lined it with rocks, placed wood in the bottom and started a fire. Long cactus shoots were arranged strategically along with the meat to capture the drippings in order to make the soup. After everything was in the hole, we filled it up and let it cook all night. In the morning, the meat and drippings were ready for a flavorful soup.

Just like in San Diego, around 300 people attended a joyful celebration filled with singing, a band of mariachi players, and a chain of men

parading under my bride's veil, with a finale of firecrackers exploding in the street outside. It was quite a send off as we headed to an Acapulco resort for our honeymoon.

However, since we were to host a pastors conference a week before, and with so much going on, we never did reserve a hotel in Acapulco. Instead, we saved money and took a collective taxicab bus and drove a half-hour to the tourist resort. On the bus, we asked around for the name of a hotel that was clean and inexpensive. A couple had shared that they were staying in a small hotel behind the convention center, so when we arrived, sure enough, there was a room for us too.

We made the most of our time on our honeymoon, eating at the little local hangouts there that serve fabulous local food. We took a trip around the bay in a glass bottom boat, where we saw cliff divers, as well as a big statue of the Virgin Mary underwater. We were also able to lead the owner of our hotel, along with his wife, to the Lord. That was the biggest highlight of our honeymoon! We later returned to have a Bible study with them and some of their friends, praying that one day we could start a church there—never knowing years later it would become a reality.

## LEARNING THE HARD WAY

The vision for the ministry continued to change. When I first drove my VW van into Mexico years before, I envisioned myself traveling from town to town, training pastors to teach systematically through the Bible. Then God poured out His Spirit and I realized that this new wine had to be poured into new wineskins, which turned into planting our first church and I found myself as the lead pastor. Now, these many years later I envisioned myself like Chuck Smith, training up pastors to go around Mexico to plant more churches. So Tania and I built a lovely house and our plan was to do just that.

I've learned, however, that God's plan is usually very different than ours. Although many times we don't understand it at the moment, Jesus will always have the perfect blueprint for our lives. So instead of the church

continuing to grow, it began to plateau. And I grew restless. God had allowed difficult things to show us what He wanted to do. Now, I must admit, I have always passionately desired to do God's will for my life, but I have also realized that most of the time I am not listening to the Lord. Determined, I just roll up my sleeves and plow forward doing whatever God has put before me. Without learning the lesson.

One day the Lord spoke to me as I was walking to the marketplace that was next to a shantytown. Back then, packs of dogs would roam the area. I had to learn to overcome my fears walking by these dogs because I was so afraid they would bite me. As I approached the marketplace, suddenly one of the stray dogs, a pit bull, attacked one of the street vendor's pet dog. The vendor kicked the pit bull in the ribs, but it continued to hang onto his dog; its fangs tearing into the throat of his pet. The owner quickly grabbed a 2 x 4 and hit the pit bull on top of the head as hard as he could. The dog collapsed to the ground but it didn't let go of his pet. The vendor had no choice but to grab a screwdriver and stab the pit bull in the eye, releasing the dog's grip from his pet. The now partially blinded pit bull ran in circles, but became reoriented and returned to the owner's dog only to bite his pet again. As you can imagine, I was fearfully paralyzed as I watched this. Life in other countries is far different than what we are accustomed to.

I could clearly hear God saying, "That, my son, is stubbornness. YOU are like that pit bull." This wasn't the most encouraging thing to hear from our beloved Jesus, but it was so true. I needed to hear it. In the next six months, the Lord was going to remove His hand of protection upon us, in order to move us to do exactly what He desired. In order for that to happen, I could not continue to be stubborn like the pit bull, seeing it would lead to my own destruction.

A few days later, I was mugged and robbed at a street market near our neighborhood. I was selling my car in front of the church and a potential buyer stopped to ask for information about the vehicle. He asked me if I could take them on a test drive. I said, "Sure," and we headed around the block. On the back street, one of the men sitting

behind me, grabbed me by the hair and yanked my head backwards. His accomplice seated next to me pressed a razor-sharp knife against my throat and threatened if I didn't give him the car, he would cut my head off. I obviously didn't argue.

Through the help of a friend who is a member of the feared judicial police, we recovered the car. By then, we had purchased another vehicle, and so I sold the car that had been stolen to one of my assistants. One night as he arrived at our front door, two men with guns jumped him and the car was stolen again.

Not long after that, my wife was preparing for a women's conference in the city of Tehuacan, Puebla and had gone to the bank to withdraw a thousand dollars from the church account. Back then, credit cards and checks were rarely used. Everything was done by cash. After getting the money, Tania dropped off our baby girl, Debbie, at daycare and then headed off to our church. No sooner had she opened the church door, two men in a Volkswagen beetle jumped out and grabbed my wife, pointing a gun to her head. They pushed her into the car, held her down, and raced off. My wife was able to keep her wits about her, and calmly explained to these men that we didn't have any money, but that she was carrying a thousand dollars cash of the church's money. They took the money, her keys and everything else she had, and then dumped her outside of Mexico City. Thankfully they didn't hurt her, but she almost had a nervous breakdown.

At the time, we had been praying about starting a new church in the city of Cuernavaca, one hour south of the capital. It was there that I received a phone call that my wife had been kidnapped and released. I didn't know if she had been hurt or any of the details. I raced back to the city with terrible thoughts running through my mind. To me this was confirmation that the Lord wanted us to move.

## STAYING THE COURSE

I was visiting a Bible study in Dallas, Texas, when the Lord shared a prophecy. This is one way the Lord has led me, by confirming His will



through His Word and occasionally using prophecy. Paul the apostle wrote, “This charge I commit unto you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before you, that you by them might war a good warfare” (1 Timothy 1:18).

When ships navigate toward the seaport, there is always the risk that they will run aground. For that reason, there is a lane that these vessels must stay within. Three lights are situated so that when they align, the captain knows he is safely able to navigate to the dock. Likewise, as Christians, we have lights that need to line up so we too can stay on course and fulfill God’s purpose in our lives. There are three things that need to line up to help us stay the course. The first is the Word of God. The Bible is a “lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path” (Psalm 119:105). The second light is being aware of our circumstances to see if God is opening a door for us to speak His Word (Colossians 4:3). The third light is the “peace that passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). We know that we know that we know. When these three lights are in alignment, then we know, by faith, that we are doing God’s will.

So there I was in Dallas, Texas in 1988 attending a home Bible study, when the Lord shared a prophetic word to the group. It was a send off dinner for a couple headed to another state. The word was actually spoken to this couple, but in reality, I thought it was for me. The message was, “You will go down and live among the palm trees, and that which you plant will blossom and bear much fruit.”

I immediately knew that this was confirmation for our family to move to the city of Cuernavaca to start a new fellowship. We sold our home in Mexico City and bought a house with a living room big enough to seat sixty people. Cuernavaca is a resort city and many of the houses are vacation homes for Mexico City residents escaping the smog on the weekends. Cuernavaca is known as the city of the “eternal spring,” because beautiful flowers blossom and bloom all year long. The name of the neighborhood where the Lord provided our house... you guessed it... The Palms.

## LIVING AMONG SATANIC WORSHIP

Once we moved in, we began to share the Lord with our neighbors right away. One day we were startled by a frantic knocking on our front door. A young man named Paco, clearly upset, asked if we were Christians and if he could come in. We have always had an open door policy wherever we have lived, for people in our neighborhood to feel free to come over to our house at any time, especially when emergencies pop up. We welcomed him in, and this eighteen-year-old began to share with us a terrifying story.

Paco told us a high priest of Satan lived in a house behind ours. His home was frequented often by military leaders, people in show business and the like. In parts of Mexico, like in the state of Veracruz, witchcraft is an accepted part of the culture and practiced by many. Usually they practice witchcraft consisting of “cleansings,” performed by the local *curandero*, or witch doctor. Millions are familiar with the ritual of taking small cuttings from the pirul tree and waving them over the patient who is lying down, and evil spirits are cleansed. Sometimes a raw egg is used to pass over the afflicted part of the body, and they believe the evil spirit will go into the egg and turn it rotten.

But this high priest of Satan was doing more than just cleansings. He was a member of a cult that had high contacts in the Mexican military. He would entice young drifters into his home and party with them, offering free drugs, alcohol and the “time of their life.” Knowing that these young drifters would never be missed, the high priest would heavily drug them and then offer them up as a human sacrifice.

According to an article in the *New York Times*, published on May 8, 1989, this human sacrifice cult was started by Adolfo Constanzo when he visited Mexico City in 1983, supporting himself as a tarot card reader. There he recruited two younger men, Martín Quintana and Omar Ochoa, to be his servants, lovers and disciples. Over the next few years he became the leader of a full-fledged religion with drug dealers, musicians and even police officers under his command. Based in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, on the U.S.-Mexico border, the religious

group sold drugs, held high-priced religious ceremonies, and by 1987, had murdered people for use in human sacrifices.

When a U.S. citizen tourist, twenty-one-year-old Mark J. Kilroy, disappeared in Matamoros, Mexico, during spring break 1989, the local police, facing pressures from Texas authorities, began to search in earnest for him. They discovered Constanzo's religion quite by accident (in an unrelated drug investigation) and, after arresting some of the members, quickly found that the cult was responsible for the murder of Kilroy. Officials said Constanzo killed Kilroy with a machete chop to the back of the neck when he tried to escape about twelve hours after being taken to the ranch. The suspects said a number of the victims were dismembered and burned.

More and more of the cult's members were arrested until, on May 6, 1989 they had cornered Constanzo and four of his followers, two of whom were his male lovers, in a dilapidated Mexico City apartment. Determined not to go to prison, Constanzo ordered one of his disciples to shoot him and Quintana. They were both dead when the police finally broke in.

One of Constanzo's most trusted leaders within his cult, Sara María Aldrete, was arrested not long after his death. She was sentenced to a total of sixty-eight years in prison for her involvement in the cult and the murders.

So on that day, April 20, 1989, shortly before this satanic cult would be discovered and eliminated, Paco, the young man who showed up at our house had just escaped from this house of horrors. Paco had been drugged but he regained consciousness. He was lying on the altar and all around him were men dressed in white hooded robes and the leader was holding up a silver dagger. He told us how he had been drugged and they had gang raped him, and when the drug wore off, he raced out of the house and came to us. We led this young man to Jesus and he wept for joy as God's Spirit confirmed to him that he had been forgiven and cleansed. He began attending our Bible study group and became one of our first disciples of Jesus in our new neighborhood.

## REACHING OUR NEW NEIGHBORS

We decided to do a neighborhood outreach. When we hold outreaches, we take advantage of the role that the fiesta has in the Mexican culture. People won't come to a religious rally, but they will come to a fiesta even if they're not invited. So we decided to have a housewarming party and invited all of our neighbors. They all came, bringing bottles of tequila, whiskey and wine with them. The priest of Satan also came with his young protégé. We were thrilled to have this outreach in our home, as we knew the power of God would crush any works of darkness.

We showed a movie of the life story of Raul Ries. People watched intently as Raul loaded a rifle and sat in his house, just waiting for his wife to return from a Bible study so he could gun her down. As Raul waited and fidgeted with the rifle, he turned on the TV, and Pastor Chuck Smith came on sharing about God's amazing love. Raul became mesmerized as God spoke to him directly through the teaching of Pastor Chuck. He finally broke down, weeping, repenting of his sin, and gave his life to Christ. At this point in the movie, the high priest and his protégé got up and stormed out of our front door. A couple of years later, I found out that they had both died of AIDS.

Although our ministry didn't seem to impact those two, during our time sharing Jesus in Cuernavaca, we saw many lives transformed which produced lasting fruit. Victor Pezet was a famous television producer who owned a large studio in the luxurious Chapultepec neighborhood in Mexico City. He lived in a multi-million dollar estate in the most exclusive neighborhood. He had retired and was living in Cuernavaca. His niece, who was a Christian, brought him over to our fellowship where he received Christ. He became my good friend and a treasured disciple of Jesus during my time in this city. His daughter Marcela, who had also received the Lord, represented the state of Morelos in the Miss Mexico beauty pageant and is currently a well-known TV star in the Latino world.

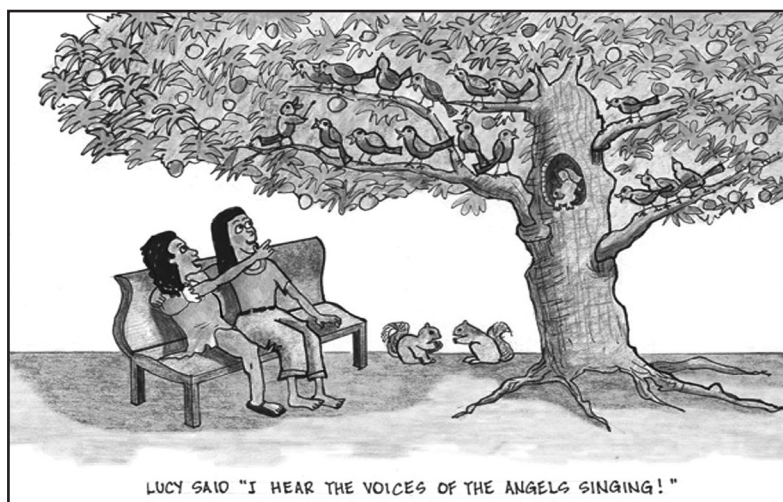
## JESUS COMES FOR HIS BRIDE

Lucy Dominguez was another neighbor who saw the glory of God. I met her a few months after her mom passed away from cancer. When I met her, tragically, she had just been diagnosed with the same sarcoma cancer at the young age of sixteen years old. When we shared with her the good news of Christ, she received the forgiveness of God and was born again. We baptized her in our pool, along with Paco, Victor, and a few others there in Cuernavaca. We prayed that Jesus would heal her, and miraculously her cancerous tumor was dramatically reduced. She experienced the power of God in a real way in her life and she was “totally turned on to the Lord.” She went on to share her faith with hundreds of people. With a big smile she would always say, “God is faithful.”

Unfortunately the cancer returned, this time in her hip. The doctors had advised an immediate amputation of her leg, as well as her hip. But instead of receiving general anesthesia for the surgery, she insisted only on a spinal block, numbing her from the waist down. This way she could remain conscious throughout the surgery. She had something that she wanted to tell the doctor. He was about to divorce his wife because she had become a Christian. When this surgeon amputated Lucy's leg, she asked the doctor to hold up her dismembered leg so she could see it. She looked at the leg and declared, “Well, leg, I'm going to serve Jesus with you or without you.” The doctor, weeping, received Jesus right there in the operating room and today is active in his congregation along with his wife.

Lucy was a gorgeous young lady. Because she was tall and very beautiful, she could have easily been a fashion model. But God chose her to be a model for Jesus. My wife took her to California where she visited Disneyland and shared her love story, the love of Jesus. Lucy also told her testimony to church congregations and many people received Jesus because they were moved by her faith through adversity. When Lucy returned to Mexico, she came to live with us. At about this time the cancer had spread. She had twenty-two tumors, the largest one was right next to her heart. We loved Lucy like our own daughter and

we had the opportunity to show her God's love by paying the bill for her surgery. Lucy's dad and family members were amazed by the goodness of God, and her story would indeed bring much fruit. Lucy never stopped believing. After recovering from her surgery, she returned to her home in the small town of El Arenal, Veracruz. One Sunday afternoon, during a visit with my wife, they both sat under a huge mango tree. A group of birds perched in the tree and Lucy and my wife, Tania, heard them singing all sorts of beautiful melodies. Lucy looked up and said, "I hear the voices of the angels singing."



Lucy had told my wife that she always longed for her wedding day, as she imagined walking down the aisle to marry the man of her dreams. She even had shared with Tania where she kept her mom's wedding dress so she could wear it on that special day. When Lucy had finally succumbed to the cancer, on her final night, right before midnight, she asked Tania to go get her mom's wedding dress. When Tania returned at 1:00 a.m. Lucy said, "Tania, can you see Him? His arms are open wide and I can see the scars from the nails in His hands, but I can't see His face. It is too bright." At 2:00 a.m. she said, "Let's pray." As my wife embraced her firmly in her arms, Lucy said in a small voice, "To God be the glory," and she went to be with Jesus. Tania dressed Lucy in her mother's wedding dress and it fit perfectly. For the

last time, she put Lucy's make up on, preparing her as a bride to meet her Husband. She placed a bouquet of roses in Lucy's hands. Now not only was she completely whole again, but she was married to the Man of her dreams. That night Jesus had come for His bride.

The whole town came to Lucy's funeral. While I preached with tears in my eyes, I did not have to make an invitation to receive Jesus, because the people came forward all by themselves. The Holy Spirit had descended upon this village. Everybody agreed that there was a revival that night as hundreds of lives were touched by the testimony of this valiant, courageous, beautiful Christian girl. I can't wait to introduce her to you when we are at the gates of heaven.

### TRIALS IN CUERNAVACA

Losing Lucy was a heavy and sad time for us, but as we continued to pray and to intercede for one another, our fellowship in Cuernavaca grew and many came to the Lord and were baptized. Our ministry broke through the power of darkness over that area and it planted seeds, which blossomed and produced much fruit years later. I can't emphasize enough about the role of intercessory prayer. It should never be discounted or looked upon as a last resort—it should be the first thing a ministry does. Though it seems like a small thing, it shouldn't be diminished. These small things are huge in God's perfect time. Without prayer, anything we do will always be in the energy of the flesh rather than it being the work of the Spirit.

Even in the midst of our prayers, the trials continued to come. But this is what the Lord desired to do in our lives in the city of Cuernavaca to bear much fruit. Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (John 12:24). When our daughter, Debbie, was three years old she was bitten by a scorpion. Simultaneously, she threw up and breathed it in—or bronco-aspirated. At the hospital they were able to get her breathing again, but the doctors believe this was probably the cause of her childhood epilepsy, which became another hardship we faced.

But the most difficult trial at that time was with our son, Jonathan. When my wife was pregnant with him in the first trimester, she got sick with typhoid fever and she was given medicine, which causes birth defects. When the doctor discovered she was pregnant, he informed her that her child would be born missing an arm, a leg, or some other part and recommended a therapeutic termination of her pregnancy. Regardless of what the doctor thought or recommended, we knew that God works all things together for the good to those who love Him.

Jonathan was born without an immunological defense system. He easily became sick with childhood diseases, including tuberculosis. When he was two years old, he contracted the German measles that brought him to the brink of death. Seventy children died during this outbreak in our city. At the time this happened, I was in Mainland China and Macau preaching, when I received a message in my hotel that our son was dying and that I needed to get home as quickly as possible. I had to take a train from where we were in China to Hong Kong, so I could fly to Los Angeles and then to Mexico City, where I could finally take a bus to Cuernavaca.

In the meantime, prayer for Jonathan had been lifted up all over the U.S. in different churches. Two Mexican peasants, who were Christians, walked by the hospital when Jonathan was admitted into the intensive care ward because his kidneys had failed. This put him into a coma. He was swollen up like a balloon and they had to put him in an oxygen tent. When these peasants saw the Christian bumper sticker, "Jesus loves you" on our car, they said, "There must be a Christian in there who needs prayer." So they walked in and asked the hospital attendants where the owners of the car could be located, and they were directed to the ICU, where my wife was with Jonathan. I wasn't there to pray for my son but these two men cried out to God on our behalf and the Lord heard them. Jonathan's kidneys started functioning and then he came out of the coma. By the time I arrived at the hospital, he was recovering steadily.

Since Jonathan had been extremely sick all the time, I felt so bad for him. I actually asked Jesus to take him home and put him out of his



suffering. I knew that in heaven he would have a new body and would never suffer again. My wife, however, prayed that if Jonathan were healed, that he could serve the Lord all the days of his life. I'm sure glad God answered her prayer and not mine.

Jonathan had a total transformation. He learned to walk, and a year later at three years old he started talking. Although he developed slowly, he never got sick again—not even a cold. When he was eighteen, he went to the dentist who took an x-ray and it showed that he had no adult teeth in part of his mouth. He still had his baby teeth on top. That was his birth defect! We praise God that he wasn't born without an arm or leg but just without some teeth. We had his baby teeth capped and today you can't notice the difference.

Cuernavaca is known as the city of the eternal spring. The reason we moved from Mexico City to Cuernavaca in the first place was because I had an allergic asthma that I developed from the smog in the city. But what I didn't know when we moved was that I also had an allergy to pollen, which got dramatically worse in Cuernavaca since the flowers blossomed year-round. One day I had an asthma attack outside the front door of our house and I passed out. The gardener next door happened to find me and took me in a taxi to the public hospital, where I finally regained consciousness as I was being treated for the asthma attack.

It didn't take much after that to realize that we needed to find a city with a dry climate which seemed to be good for people with asthma. The Lord once again used our health to move us to a new city where He desired for us to plant another church. And once again, Jesus led us into new and dynamic ministries, as He desired to do a new work in our great country.

“But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 5:10-11).



# MULTITUDES DISCOVER THE LIVING JESUS

“Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert” (Isaiah 43:19).

## MINISTERING IN MAZATLAN

As a surfer, I have always loved the town of Mazatlan. In 1981 Peter and Lupe Pitts, who would later go on to plant the church in Aguascalientes, moved to Mazatlan to disciple a couple they had led to the Lord in San Diego. And then in 1985, the Lord called Joe and Laurie Pacheco to move there to plant the church. Today God is using Joe and Laurie in a powerful way and this is the largest evangelical church in the city.

Around this time, I invited Pastor Mike MacIntosh from San Diego to come help me do some evangelism. We would preach in parks and on street corners, in schools and in auditoriums. In Mazatlan, we had wonderful outreaches on the beach where hundreds of locals would come to hear the music and the gospel presentation. In 1985, we did an outreach at the Fisherman’s Plaza there on the sand. On one of the outreaches, Mario “El Chitah,” the Mexican national surfing champion, gave his life to the Lord and became a leader in the church there.

There was a little seven-year-old deaf girl named Wendy who came with her sister to the plaza that night. When the invitation was given, they both came forward. As the wind rustled the palm trees on a hot, humid, tropical night, the Spirit of the Lord was moving as a majestic wind as well. We asked these two little girls if they wanted to receive Jesus into their hearts and Wendy’s sister enthusiastically responded yes. She then used sign language to explain the gospel to Wendy, to see if she too wanted to receive Jesus. Wendy smiled and placed her hand

over her heart and said yes. We prayed together and then we asked the Lord to heal Wendy, as we put our fingers in her ears. Afterwards, as the girls sat listening to the Danny Cruz band play a final song, little Wendy started swaying with the music and she grabbed her sister and began to tell her in sign language that she could hear the music. They ran together and told their mother, and Wendy's entire family was impacted by the love of God that evening.

I asked Mike MacIntosh to preach in Mazatlan's baseball stadium. I remember climbing to the top of the hill that overlooked Mazatlan and I asked Jesus to open the door for Mike. And He did. The newly elected mayor of the city, Humberto García, was the first evangelical mayor of any city in Mexico. He said we could preach anywhere we wanted. As we began making preparations getting the pastors together, the door suddenly opened for Pastor Mike to travel to the Philippines, where Mike held his first Festival of Life outreach. It was amazing. I didn't realize when I prayed that day overlooking Mazatlan that God was looking across the ocean! We saw the power of prayer in a mighty way there in the Southeast Pacific as God opened doors and performed miracles. This was only the beginning.

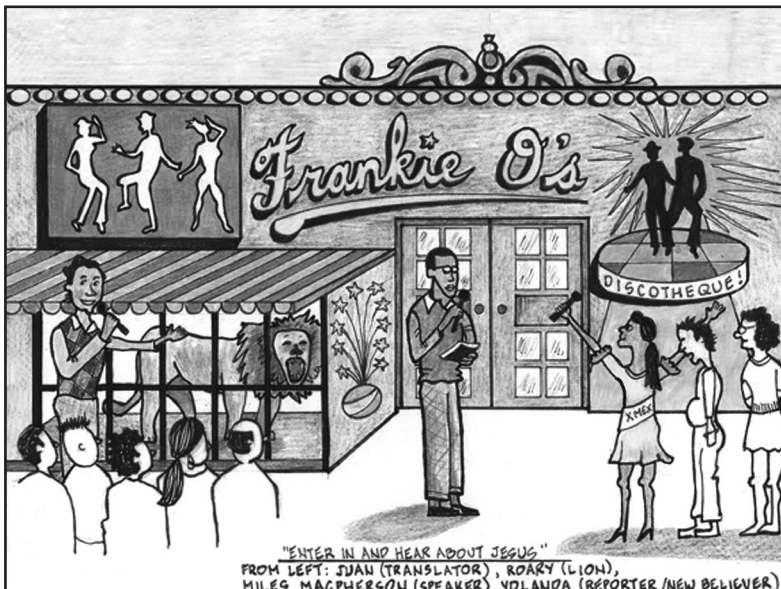
### THE FESTIVAL OF LIFE

The Festival of Life is an outreach to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to an entire city. With the help of various pastors to pray for Mazatlan, as well as working with city leaders and with the press, we brought a team of forty-five people in from Mexico City for a three-night outreach. Marcos Witt, a young singer who had visited our house in Mexico City when he was traveling around the country, became the lead singer for the Festival of Life in Mazatlan. The Lord would later use Marcos Witt to impact all of Latin America, reaching his generation for Jesus with a whole new ministry of worship. He eventually established a large church in Houston, Texas and today has continued to be a powerful voice for Jesus in Mexico and Latin America. We were so blessed to have him with us at our first Festival of Life outreach. The musicians who formed the band for the famous Mexican singer,

Luis Miguel, also shared their music. The baseball stadium filled up with hundreds of people as Mike preached the gospel for three nights. It turned out to be a great response to the gospel.

What Mike didn't know, though, was that behind the scenes, the Mexican secretary of the interior had sent agents to look into what we were doing. Even though the mayor was involved in helping us and he had given us the correct city permits, we were not legal according to the Constitution at the time. The agents interviewed me and asked me if the mayor was going to speak from the platform. I made sure he didn't. He did greet everybody from the stands and the agents went back to Mexico City and the gospel went forward.

Francisco Arellano Felix, the head of the largest Mexican drug cartel at the time, owned a discotheque in Mazatlan, called Frankie O's. We shared the gospel with Francisco at the mayor's prayer breakfast, even though people had told us not to talk to him. But Jesus loves everybody. So the head of the drug cartel loaned us his discotheque free of charge to do an outreach.



Hector Hermosillo, along with his band, Torre Fuerte, had the crowd riveted with the driving music that they played and the Spirit moved powerfully. People were getting saved! Since the Festival of Life was gaining a lot of attention, I was asked to be interviewed on television. When I met the young reporter, named Yolanda, it was at the discotheque. Right at the entrance was a huge cage with a live roaring lion. That sure made for an exciting background for a television interview.

Miles McPherson, an ex-NFL player and today the founding pastor of the Rock Church in San Diego, preached the gospel and I translated. This crowd seemed mesmerized by the Spirit of God, and Yolanda, as well as many others, came forward in the discotheque to make a public stand for Jesus.

Mike MacIntosh led the team and did some of the biggest outdoor rallies that cities had ever seen at the time. After the Festival of Life in Mazatlan, we then went to Guadalajara in 1993 and received legal permits to do a Festival in the downtown Bluewater Park. Carnival rides were set up, evangelism teams canvassed the city, doctors treated patients at free medical clinics in poor areas, professors gave lectures at the university, and almost all the evangelical churches joined us in the nightly celebrations. Even a world heavyweight boxing contender shared his testimony along with other athletes.

I met personally with the state governor, Carlos Rivera, who opened many doors for us to continue to preach the gospel. The head of the state police department, Lieutenant Colonel Teodoro Higuera, received the Lord and he joined us on the stage for the evening outreach. He assigned twenty-two patrol cars for security at the park. When the city mayor took the heat from traditional religious leaders for allowing us to preach at the park, he sent the city police to shut us down. But when the police arrived, the state police greeted them and let them know that the governor had been touched when we shared with him about the Festival. God was definitely giving us favor with influential people. Another time when I went to Mexico City to invite Maria de Los Angeles Moreno, the speaker of the House of

Representatives, to our prayer breakfast in Guadalajara, we developed a lasting relationship based upon our faith in Jesus. Years later when she became a senator, she encouraged Senator Silva Cota to lead his son to Jesus. We prayed together and she was always very kind to me.

The outreach was successful and hundreds of people came to the Lord there at the Bluewater Park. These believers were channeled back into the churches to be discipled and there was great joy in the city.

My heart was always with the poorest of the poor because God loves everybody. But I knew that reaching key leaders in Mexico would make this happen. My educational background and experience helped me to develop a relationship with many influential leaders, which led to more open doors for the gospel around Mexico. I never wanted to be the one in front of the crowd, but rather the one behind the scenes interceding in prayer.

### **MORE FESTIVALS**

After Mazatlan and Guadalajara, we continued to put on more Festivals in the cities of La Paz, Mexicali, Ensenada, Hermosillo, Ciudad Juarez, Queretaro, Aguascalientes, Puerto Vallarta, Rosarito and Tuxtla Guterrez in the state of Chiapas. Countless lives were changed and I'm looking forward to meeting many of those people when they arrive in heaven.

In the city of Queretaro, we held the Festival in October 2001, just four weeks after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. For a brief moment in history the Festival team was granted extraordinary favor for the event in the city. We were allowed to use the stadium that was built for the 1986 World Cup soccer championship. As usual, however, there was opposition from the established church and they decided to rent a popular large bullring to hold a simultaneous event, preventing any people from going to the stadium to attend the Festival.

Nevertheless, a busload of forty seminary students from the town of San Juan Del Rio arrived to attend the meeting in the bullring, but they got lost and wound up at the soccer stadium. All forty of these

future priests came forward during the invitation to receive Christ publicly. And not only that, but a torrid downpour soaked the crowd that was at the bullring, while on the other side of the city not a single drop of rain fell in the stadium. The Festival of Life outreaches were greatly used by God to share in so many different venues.

### MINISTERING IN RUSSIA

God has His plan for each country. He was working in Russia too. Back in December of 1991, I happened to be in Russia the very day the Soviet Union crumbled. The economy crashed and you could buy a meal for half-a-penny. During this time the Lord allowed me to teach at the state university in St. Petersburg, where their future professors receive their degrees. It was a special moment as I taught the need to address the spiritual dimension in the education of children. It wasn't just enough to form their intellect—I taught we also had the responsibility to form their character and civic responsibility, and to help their spiritual development.

I boldly taught from the text John 3:16, proclaiming, “You must be born again. There is a spiritual world, and one must be born of the Spirit.” I shared with these atheists that the only way we could make a positive impact on our world was to follow the words of Jesus, and that was, “to love our neighbor.” But that’s impossible in our own strength. First, we must ask God to forgive us of our own sins to receive the gift of God’s love and eternal life, in order to love others and make this a better world. But, I explained, we could not teach something we had not received. Twenty-five of the students in the lecture hall stood up and said they wanted to be born again and follow Christ.

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things’” (Romans 10:14-15).



## CHAPTER 12

# THE BLESSING ARRIVES

“The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail” (Isaiah 58:11).

A wonderful ministry of evangelism had been birthed and people were excited about Jesus. But the Lord was going to teach me a lesson about the death of a ministry, even as He had said that the seed must first die before much fruit can come.

We needed to find a city, centrally located, that had a dry climate so it would be good for my allergies and asthma, which had become unbearable in the city of Cuernavaca. Queretaro, three hours north of Mexico City, was not only a good place for my allergies, but more importantly, a perfect place to plant a church. Only one half of one percent of the population was evangelical Christian. The religious tradition there was among the most hard-core in all the country. Bibles were burned in some of the communities outside of the city just because they were called Protestant Bibles.

When we had started street evangelism in Mexico City, with teams and drama presentations and music bands, the Mexico City newspaper, *Ovaciones* printed a two-inch gigantic headline that read, “FOREIGN CULT INVADES CITY.” Life was about to change in Mexico.

## CHURCHES GET LEGAL STATUS

For the first time since the revolution, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the president of the country at the time, ordered the Constitution to be amended which endorsed churches to be recognized as a legal entity. Churches could now be approved to own property and to preach

public evangelism with permits. Foreign missionaries were also certified to legally work within the country. The Lord had prophesied this exactly in our prayer meeting ten years prior, and now it was becoming true.

Since the authorities do not license lawyers, engineers or architects, I learned many trades over the years because I realized that our ministry needed these important skills. So seeing an open door, I quickly prepared a 250-page legal document for our group of twelve churches, and it was one of the very first religious associations recognized by the Mexican government. This not only authorized us to acquire legal status for the churches we had started, but it also gave us the opportunity to receive a fresh new generation of missionaries legally and to hold more Festivals of Life outreaches around the country.

But back in Queretaro, we still waited for the breakthrough. The most difficult trial in the ministry was the waiting period—to be teaching, sharing and loving, but not seeing any fruit. More difficult than sickness or persecution is to await helping people's lives being touched by God's great love. As a dear friend of mine, Randy, prayed years earlier, "Lord, if You don't reach these people, You will have died in vain." He prayed this weeping and it was ingrained in my spirit for the rest of my life.

The next two years were the most difficult. We had started a Bible study with a lady named Rocio and her alcoholic brother which grew to eight people. We had a federal highway patrolman attending, and his family, among others. However, during the second year, the group dwindled down to only one person, and it wasn't even the same person who had first attended.

Financially, we also hit bottom. We couldn't sell our house in Cuernavaca because the economy and the banking system had crashed. Credit card interest rates soared to 180 percent. We had purchased a government housing-type condo where we lived for six years in the

city. It was 800-square feet and the four of us lived there, plus my mother-in-law and Tania's first daughter, Angelica.

We were completely broke financially when our Volkswagen van developed engine problems and had to be taken into the shop. I had to ask a friend to put the charge on his credit card because it was our only vehicle. Thankfully I was able to work teaching business classes in a secular university since I had my degree. It paid \$300 a month and it got us through a difficult time. We learned to live as a family the exact same way I had learned to live back when I was single and living in my van.

I remember taking all-night bus rides every week to Guadalajara in preparation for the Festival there, and then returning the next night, once again sleeping during the night on the bus. But these times of difficulty would become some of the best family times we ever had. I walked our two little ones to school in the mornings there in Queretaro and we would hunt for snakes after school let out. I never told them that there weren't really any snakes around, because it was so much fun breaking off sticks and using them as swords to smash anything in our path as we walked through the trees and bushes. When we saw gopher holes, we would push our sticks down the hole and see if a snake would come rushing out. One never did, but we were always expecting it, hoping to jump back in anticipation.

### MY FAMILY TREASURE

One day when I had a little extra cash, I hid a treasure map and some money in a bushy field. As the children and I went along poking our sticks in the different holes, suddenly Debbie poked her stick in a hole that had an old piece of paper folded up. Excitedly, Jonathan reached down to pick it up, and as he unfolded it, he exclaimed that it was a map to find buried treasure. The kids were four and five years old at the time and they had never been more excited in their lives.

We followed the instructions on the map, searching for trees, pacing off steps from a big boulder, pacing out more steps from another tree until we finally found where the X lay. The kids started frantically digging

with their bare hands in the dirt but didn't find anything. They were so disappointed. I told them to keep looking, that perhaps we had made a miscalculation. They got excited again and resumed digging, when all of a sudden, Jonathan screamed, "I found treasure!" The fifty-peso bill was old and tattered, but it sure could buy a lot of candy back then.

Debbie was so disappointed. Her huge brown eyes welled up with tears. She looked up at me seemingly to say, "I didn't find anything." So I told her to keep digging, maybe there was more buried treasure in the area. Suddenly, her stick struck something in the dirt and there it was... another old fifty-peso bill. The two children just went berserk. If you asked Jonathan and Debbie today about their most exciting experiences when they were kids, they won't tell you about the time they visited Disneyland or traveled to see snow in Canada and water ski for the first time. No, they will tell you about our adventures hunting snakes.

### GOD IN THE MIDST OF THE TRIAL

God is not a debtor. He knows our needs before we even ask Him. We had first purchased a house in Mexico City with a loan from my mother and later, with the generous wedding gifts we received, we were able to remodel the house and build a second story. We sold the house for the same price as what we paid for the house in Cuernavaca.

Even as the Lord was preparing us financially, He was working deep in our spirits to prepare us for the work that He wanted to do through us. When we moved to Queretaro, we needed to sell the house in Cuernavaca, but there weren't any buyers who could pay cash.

Believing prayer moves mountains, I remember so clearly kneeling down with my four-year-old son and thanking the Lord that our house had not sold. If God wanted us to go bankrupt, and that was His perfect will, then our Father knew best. In effect, I was thanking the Lord for the trial. "In all things give thanks, for this is the will of God" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). I rejoiced that our Lord is sovereign and He knows what is best for us. He just wants us to be grateful for what we have, knowing that there are many people who are worse off

around the world, even starving to death. Sometimes we think we have a sense of entitlement that God has to do certain things for us. He doesn't. If He desires for us to follow in the steps of Job through trials and hardships, we should still have a grateful heart.

The night is at its darkest when the morning light dawns. Two weeks after my prayer with Jonathan, a government agency approached us to rent the house, even though we only had it on the market for sale. Jesus wanted to take care of our needs on a long-term basis and chose to have the house rented rather than sold. Years later, this same house was used to start a thriving church and it was converted into a Christian primary school and also used for Sunday school. Father knows best. If we had sold the house, this could have never happened.

So the house that didn't sell in Cuernavaca suddenly rented out for \$2,000 dollars a month, increasing to \$3,300 over the next few years. Then there was a devaluation of the peso, and the money could buy twice as much. I never had to work a secular job again—and we were used to living on next to nothing anyway. This was a great opportunity to invest in real estate, so we were able to purchase the property for our church in Queretaro, which today is worth more than one million U.S. dollars. Later, when we would have to move to Ensenada, we had enough money to buy a bigger home for our growing family.

### WORKING IN PRAYER

Spiritually, a new day was about to burst forth, breaking through the darkness and sending light into the city of Queretaro. It is hard to justify your existence as a missionary when you don't see any fruit. But you can take that frustration and turn it into prayer for souls. Jesus taught a parable,

“That men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying: ‘There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, “Get justice for me from my adversary.” And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, “Though I do not fear God nor regard man,

yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.” Then the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?’” (Luke 18:1-8).

Psalm 132:4-6 pleads, “Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the LORD, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.”

There is a fine balance between the glorious rest of faith and persevering prayer. We read in Hebrews 4:9-11, “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.”

First of all, you can’t rest *until* you have worked. Rest without work is laziness; it’s something God will never bless. We have to labor to enter into that rest. We have to be diligent and apply ourselves totally in obeying God’s Word, yet realizing it is “God who both wills and works out His good pleasure through us” (Philippians 2:13). “The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory comes from the Lord,” Proverbs 21:31 tells us.

Jesus has created us to be His workmanship, His poem, as we simply yield ourselves like the pen in the poet’s hand. He is the Potter and we are the clay. We must not resist the Potter’s touch, even if He is painfully shaping us or cutting away excess clay, which is the flesh that so easily entangles us. “I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living,” Psalm 27:13 tells us. God’s sovereignty, void of His goodness, will strike terror in our hearts.

We know that the tender loving mercies of the Lord endure forever. God had to repeat that over and over and over again in Psalm 136, to get the message through to our thick skulls. Romans 2:4 teaches us, “The goodness of the Lord leads us to repentance.”

### BEING BROKEN FOR THE LORD

When I first became a Christian, I remember being in a meeting learning about the gifts of the Spirit. When the teacher had come to the gift of revelation, I prayed for a vision. As we waited upon the Lord, I cleared my mind of all my thoughts and tried to see a picture in my mind. The picture I saw was a grainy black-and-white image of Aladdin’s lamp. I wasn’t sure if that was a real vision or not, so I tried again. This time I clearly saw a coconut on a table with a two-inch square of the thick, hard brown shell cut out, with the white coconut meat lying next to it. I had no idea what any of this meant.

That night as I drove down the freeway, a voice in my mind said, “Good fruit does not come by rubbing a magic lamp, but rather by breaking the hard shell of your heart. Temper yourself and your zeal, for it is for your breaking unto the glorious fruit that I would have you bear.” I knew that the hard shell referred to my heart and the love of myself. The Lord did not want to remove my zeal for the Lord’s house, but rather temper it. Steel that is tempered is made stronger by being put through the fire. Jesus wanted my zeal to be even stronger, as my motivation would be to love people through a broken heart—to be passionately compassionate. People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.

That goes back to the same prayer, “Lord, break me.” Matthew states, “And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder” (Matthew 21:44). It isn’t to suffer necessarily, but it is to lose your life as Jesus taught His disciples. You let go of your control. You let God do whatever He wants in your life. We used to sing the chorus, “Lord, reduce me to love.” We have risked everything on the fact that, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” We have willingly placed ourselves where we could

be destroyed and ruined, if not for the grace of God. If we live in a comfort zone, we will never experience God's best in our lives.

I had a friend in Mexico City in the early 80s who was a seminary graduate with his PhD in missions. He labored five years in a city of 20 million people and went home without making a single disciple. We cannot accomplish; indeed, it is actually impossible to do the work of the Spirit in the energy of the flesh. You cannot take a class on how to be broken. You have to want it more than anything in the world, so that God would be glorified and exalted in ways that are humanly impossible. The world has yet to see what God can do through a person totally yielded to Him. His eye is going "to and fro throughout the whole earth looking for that person whose heart is completely toward Him" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

It is not enough to have the desire to be used. It is not enough to be willing to be broken. We must... "After having done all these things, stand," Ephesians 6:13 says. We need to stand in the gap with one hand gripping tightly the hand of God, and with the other hand, reaching out to souls drowning in a sea of illusions and false hopes. And if we are to stand in the gap, we need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, who "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:7-8).

Jesus made His abode among us, or as in the Greek, "tabernacled" among us. He lived through the same experiences we do. He knows our pain from first-hand experience. Jesus was God's intercessor.

We too can be God's intercessors. The only way to learn how to do it is by actually standing in the gap for other people. We live like the people live. We willingly place ourselves where we can learn the pain that the people around us feel.

## PERSEVERANCE

In my case, I was going to lose my mind if the people in Queretaro didn't come to Jesus. I wasn't asking for a lot; I was simply begging



the Lord for two families so we could start a Sunday service. Like the widow before the judge, I decided to pray for those two families day and night until God couldn't take it anymore.

But God didn't give me a quick answer. So I kept praying as I drove and as I walked. And as I lay in bed at night, I kept praying. I didn't try to intellectually remember my normal prayer list, or people I pray for regularly, nor did I pray for daily issues. If God was to hear my voice it was one thing: TWO FAMILIES. TWO FAMILIES. TWO FAMILIES.

I don't necessarily recommend you pray this way; I am simply telling you my story of how God worked in my life and how He brought the gospel to our city. Theologically, it really doesn't make sense, because God's Word says that He wants all people to be saved, so we know it is His will. I never prayed the prayer, "Lord, break me," all these years because I learned it in the Bible. A man used of God to bring revival, Mr. Willis, taught me to pray this way, and I did it simply because I believed him and saw the results of this prayer in his life. So I feel the responsibility to retell this truth that my friend learned in the 1905 Welsh revival. I don't want it to die out. I want to pass it forward to the next generation through this book.

You cannot do anything but pray—until you have prayed. Once you have prayed then the doors will open for you to enter the rest of faith. Again, I can't explain this, but you no longer have to strive to make things happen. You become totally and utterly convinced that God wants to do His work through you. Not because you are any better than anyone else, because you're not, but rather because you know there is no good thing in you. And if something good happens, you know the Lord did it. Even in your subconscious mind, when people come to thank you for something that God did, you laugh to yourself, because you know that God worked *in spite of you*, not because of you.

The secret to rest in faith is abiding in Christ. No more, no less. Hudson Taylor stated that when he had a guest spend the night at his house,

even when the guest was asleep and unconscious of the fact, he was still abiding in his house. We should never be conscious of *not abiding* in Christ. In other words, we should start the day in a peaceful communion with the Lord, and simply maintain that communion throughout the day. No striving and struggling, but simply thinking about Jesus. Not necessarily even praying, but resting in the fact that Jesus has taken possession of us. He is moving us around as pieces on His chessboard, maneuvering us to take down the enemy king. The greatest thing I can do is to have His hand upon my life, a small piece on the world's board.

When I was young I was filled with great ideas on how to do so many things for Jesus. During this time in Queretaro, I came to the end of myself and realized that it is God who initiates and we simply respond. I knew from the first time I visited Mexico that He was going to produce fruit through the Holy Spirit, and so I simply had to get under the spout of God's living water. I can rest knowing that His living water is what the world needs. It is this living water that nourishes the plants and trees to bear much fruit. I subconsciously understand that *He* is the one doing the work and I dare never to touch His glory. We need to be careful not to minister in such a way as to draw attention to ourselves.

### FRUIT IN QUERETARO

After two years of ministry in Queretaro, we had one disciple. She was the sister of Alejandro Alonso, whose stepfather had once been the governor of the state years ago. In 1979 Alejandro was already a Christian and his band played at the same outreach that I attended. Alejandro then went on to pioneer the Maranatha music ministry in Spanish at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa. And now he was coming to help us facilitate an outreach and plant our church.

A week before the outreach, which was intended to launch a new fellowship, Alejandro was on his way over to our house to pray for the concert. I received a phone call that morning from Cuernavaca telling me that the renters had moved out, leaving the house a disaster and leaving us without the monthly income.

That morning I read a devotional about Harry Ironside, who had just started the Dallas Theological Seminary in Texas in the 1920s. Unfortunately, they were going to have to close the Bible college because they had run out of money. The great preacher boldly prayed for the ministry and said that “the Lord who owns the cattle on a thousand hills” would provide for His work at the college. While they were still in the prayer meeting, their secretary rushed in and interrupted, saying that they had just received a check to not only keep the doors from closing, but also to expand the ministry. Ironside looked at the check and noticed that the donor was a cattle rancher and quipped, “The Lord sold some of His cattle and gave us the money.”

After sharing that devotion with Alejandro, I commented that even though we didn’t have any money, we, by faith, were going to somehow put on the concert. As we began to pray, the phone rang. On the other end of the line was a church secretary who asked me if I was sitting down. And then she blurted out, “I have a check for \$25,000 dollars!” I couldn’t believe it. My dear friend from Canada had heard God’s voice and responded without even knowing the need. Alejandro and I were brought to tears. Not only did it pay for the concert, but we were able to buy the best sound system we had ever owned—for a church that hadn’t even started. Plus there was money left over to pay for a roof we needed when we moved into our future church.

The concert went great and dozens of people came forward to receive Christ. The next day we held a Bible study at the Mirabel Hotel across the street from the Central Park, and a good-sized group came from the concert, whom I invited to our first Sunday service. I’m sure missionaries from other countries can relate to what it is like to start a church in a Muslim country. The community at large doesn’t want anything to do with you. Such was the case with our church plant in Queretaro. Only *one* person came to our first church service.

So Alejandro’s sister, Maris, sat next to my wife and our children in the first row of 100 chairs that we had set up. Our daughter Angelica, twenty years old at the time, led the worship and I taught from the book of Mark. The next Sunday, by faith, we left the 100 chairs set

up, believing God for a miracle. Again, it was just Maris and my family who attended. The following Sunday was Christmas, and since my mother was visiting, we had two more people. The next week we were back to one single soul.

Among the different outreaches we were doing in the city, we had visited a school for special needs children who needed shoes. Well, one of the first persons we disciplined, Rocio, had a friend who owned a shoe store that was going out of business. Her name was Paula. So we loaded the kids into a bus, took them to a shoe store downtown, and we bought them each a pair of new shoes. Afterward Rocio told Paula that there was a group of Christians meeting in a downtown hotel that might want to buy her inventory of footwear.

So the next Sunday, in January of 1994, Paula and her husband, Ismael, including their six children came to church. I can't tell you how happy I was to see some of the chairs filled. After the service, she asked me if I would like to buy some shoes for the poor children. I said, "Absolutely. Come to the service next Sunday and I will give you the shoe sizes we need for the children." So this family came again next week and I gave her the shoe sizes. I told her to come back the following Sunday to bring the shoes. So the next Sunday Paula brought the shoes and I asked her how much they were. After we agreed on a price, I told her to come back the next Sunday and I would pay her.

By then this beautiful family had received Christ. Not only that, but they invited their brother-in-law's family and their sister-in-law's family. Then they invited a couple named Gerardo and Esther and their family. By February of 1994, we had baptized twelve new believers from four families—not just two as I had prayed—and God was just beginning. Eventually hundreds of families would come to know Christ. God is always faithful to do everything exceedingly abundantly above all that we could ask or think according to His riches in glory.

## GOD'S PLANS

As a way of discipling men in the church, I have always met with them outside of the church, either in their home or place of business. When

I found out that Paula's husband, Ismael, owned a construction company that was contracted to work on a massive dam project financed by the World Bank, I asked him if I could go with him to see the dam. He was thrilled. That day we talked, ate tacos and had an incredible time together. From that moment on we became lifelong friends. We even took a trip and drove into another state to see the massive turbines used to generate electricity from the wastewater of Mexico City.

On the drive back home, I shared with him the vision I had for some property to build a church and a school. I told him we would need at least 2,000 square meters or half an acre. As soon as I said this to Ismael, the Devil spoke to my heart very clearly, "You liar. You don't have the people or the money to do a project like that. You're making him believe in something when you are just a big liar." I thought about it for a minute and I chuckled as the Devil had a point there. What I was saying was absolutely ridiculous. Was I perhaps wrong?

It turned out that just one year later we had purchased the very property that I pointed out to Ismael. Although it was not for sale when we had first driven by, my dear friend Ismael did, in fact, oversee our construction project to build an incredible facility. It turns out that the Devil was the liar. Who gets the last laugh anyway? I delight to see Satan crushed under our Lord's feet.

## MINISTERING IN CHIAPAS

Going back to the first weeks of our new church, a military uprising occurred in the southern state of Chiapas. The Mexican military had sent fighter jets to bomb insurgent locations as Subcommandante Marcos led a band of left-wing guerrillas. I saw this as a great opportunity for evangelism. As I prayed, the Lord showed me that there were people in Chiapas who were praying at that very moment, "Lord, give us this day our daily bread." Peasant groups displaced by the fighting literally had no food at all. I asked Paula if she wanted to donate the rest of the new shoes she had from her store to help out this cause, and smiling from ear to ear, she said sure.

So four of us, including the new believers, loaded up a truck with shoes, and sacks of beans and corn, and we started out on the 24-hour drive into the jungles of Chiapas. Our first stop was in the city of San Cristobal de las Casas. Many people had already brought supplies to this area, so we continued our journey south. We passed through the town of Comitán, and finally stopped a man walking in a small village. We asked him if he knew of a group of people that were praying to God to provide them food. This man looked at me in a state of shock and said, "I am a pastor of a community and I'm here in this town looking for work, but there is none. But there are people back in my community who have hardly eaten anything in weeks. We planted the corn we had brought with us, but we are still waiting for the harvest so we can eat." Amazing. After driving for 24 hours the first person we stopped was the very person that we had prayed for days earlier.

This man jumped in the truck and led us through the jungle. There was no road. I have no idea how he remembered the way to this encampment. We were driving around in a maze of trees, coming into open grassy fields, and then back to driving around through trees again. After about half an hour, we came into the open clearing, where we could see four-foot-tall cornstalks filling the valley. Around the far edge of the area we could see a series of huts made with the surrounding tree branches. In the middle of the row of huts, there was a big, wood structure. This is where we stopped. It was their place of worship, the first building they had constructed.

This Christian community had been forced, because of their Christian faith, to leave their houses and farmlands during the guerrilla uprising. They literally had nothing. I will never forget when they lined up in front of the big hut to receive our provisions. Not one of them had shoes and their clothing was tattered and patched, kind of like what people look like stranded on a deserted island. And yet, they were peaceful. There was no rushing or pushing as they gathered. We all took each other by the hand and we thanked Jesus that He heard our prayers and had brought our daily bread. I can't describe for you

the tearful gratitude of this beautiful, wonderful, amazing part of our family in Christ. And I can't wait to see them again.

As we wound our way through the jungle to get back to the highway, I was compelled to ask the pastor what they did if somebody got sick. He looked at me strangely, as if to say, "Why would you ask that?" He said, "We pray. What do you think we do?" There were no medical facilities or somewhere where they could get medicine within hours of this remote village. So I asked again, "What do you do when you pray and they don't get better?" Once more he stared at me in disbelief—after all, I was a Christian pastor. "Obviously, we pray again. Elijah prayed seven times before the rain came down." James said, "Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" (James 2:5) There is no question that he was right.

### FAITH IN ACTION

When we returned from this trip, our leaders had a true understanding of what Christianity was all about since they had personally been involved. I remember back while we were at the church in Mexico City that I had made the mistake of doing almost all of the hands-on work myself, trying to be that example of a servant. As I watched other religious leaders being served by the people and unwilling to get their hands dirty, I wanted to do just the opposite. We were a great example, but regrettably, it didn't give the people in the fellowship the opportunity to serve in the church and in the community. What a blessing it was now to see the people's faith grow as they participated in ministry.

As a group, we continued to share God's love in the hospitals and with special needs children. It gave us the inspiration to sponsor the first ever wheelchair basketball tournament in the city. We asked everyone in our fellowship to find something they could personally do to get involved, whether it was a prayer ministry, Sunday school, women's ministry, sports ministry, missions trips, music ministry or community outreach. We found that the Christians who put their faith into action had the most fun. "Serve the Lord with gladness and rejoice

forever more” became our motto, and our vision statement continued to be, “To know Christ and make Him known.”

During this time we met Dario Hillebrand, who had been confined to a wheelchair due to a motorcycle accident. With his faith and determination, he organized a home for abandoned children and he became very involved with our church. Members from our fellowships in three different cities had the opportunity to come alongside of Dario and help. It was a wonderful experience for the believers to live out their faith. Our daughter, Angelica, married a young man from our church and became a volunteer as the administrator and a board member of this wonderful ministry called Bread of Life, helping abandoned children.

Dario later opened a fabulous Christian K-12 school where three of our grandchildren currently attend. He also founded a teacher-training academy on the six acres of land that he was able to purchase on the edge of the city. This work continues to grow and flourish today.





## LAYING THE FOUNDATION

It was wonderful to watch others in our congregation play a key role in what God was doing. Ismael, our contractor, allowed our fellowship to move rent-free into a facility that he owned. He also helped to build a roof over the patio, which gave us lots of Sunday school rooms. And during this same time, we were able to purchase a half-acre lot that had previously been farmland, but was recently re-zoned. It was perfect except that it had an irrigation channel running through the middle of the property. I asked Ismael that if I had enough faith to buy the property, could he run a massive pipe to channel the irrigation water? He said, “No problem, I’ll have it done in three days.” I thought he was crazy because we would literally have to shut off the irrigation water to all the farmers who desperately depended on the allocation of this water for their livelihood. I envisioned farmers coming after us with shotguns, ordering us to turn the water back on.

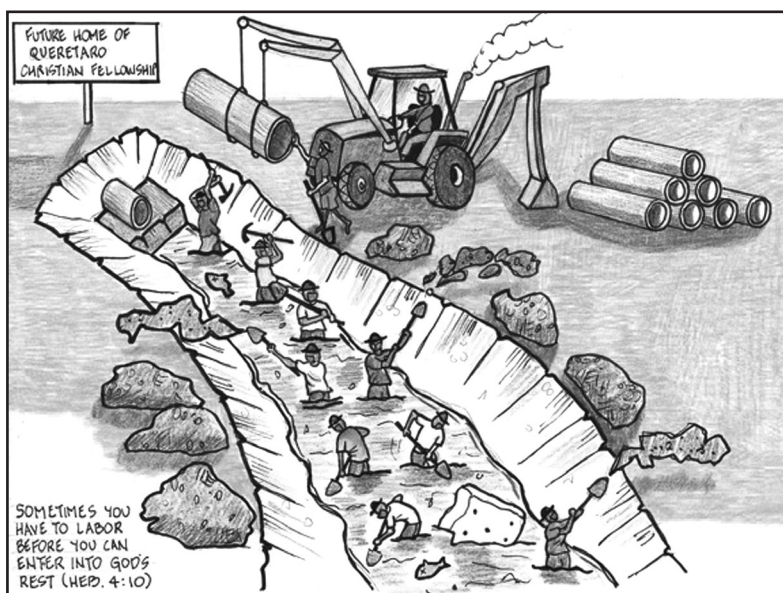
There was another problem to consider: the church body thought the pastor had lost his mind! I could see the incredible potential for this property, realizing it had seventy meters or 240 feet of frontage on the highway, half a mile from downtown and half a mile from the state university. Knowing that the irrigation water flowed from the sewage treatment plant made a lot of people cringe. But in my mind’s eye, I envisioned a grass soccer field behind the church, where poor Mexican dads could play soccer with their boys and bond with them after the church services. It would be one of the few grass soccer fields in town—watered with free irrigation water.

“I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth—Praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the LORD” (Psalm 40:1-3).

I told the men of our church that we were all going to descend into the irrigation canal to scoop out the “miry clay” in order to lay a three-foot wide pipe. We would also need to build a good-sized brick junction

box so that the farmers could have immediate access to the irrigation gates for their farms.

So there we were, attempting the seemingly impossible project to lay the pipe at our church property in three days. We diverted the irrigation water and flooded a farmer's field, which he appreciated. Water is a very scarce commodity in this part of Mexico, and it helped prepare the soil to plant his next crop. We decided to do the work on a holiday weekend, so the rest of the farmers were out getting drunk and didn't even realize what we had done. As we cleaned out the mud, Ismael and Gerardo used a backhoe with a steel cable to lower heavy sections of pipe into place. Beto, Gerardo's father-in-law, built the junction box, and after three days of nonstop work, the water flowed again through the new drainage pipe that had been installed.



We tacked up a sign on the highway in front of the property letting contractors know they could dump their excavation dirt for free. We received over 500 truckloads of fill dirt and someone even supplied the backhoe to back fill the pipes, all for free. And finally we used

the large existing concrete canal walls as footings for our first Sunday school rooms.

## LEADERSHIP ROLES

The men of our fellowship—taxi drivers, lawyers, school teachers, businessmen, shop owners and day laborers—tied a bandanna over their mouths and noses and descended into waist deep miry, muddy, stinky irrigation water. We pulled out an old mattress and other debris, shoveled the mud until our arms felt like they would fall off. A genuine camaraderie developed between the men, just like the bond between the leaders who went on our trip to the Chiapas jungle. This was *their* church. These men became the leaders and they made our church a reality.

In the Mexican culture, the mother is seen as the spiritual leader of the family. So it was extremely important to teach the men the biblical principle of being the leader in their homes. First Timothy 3 teaches men the qualifications necessary to be a leader in the church, but it must begin first in his home.

“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop (a leader or an elder), he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)” (1 Timothy 3:1-5).

The men needed to embrace their roles to be a godly example to their family and their community; this way they could radiate the love of Jesus everywhere they went.

The ladies in the fellowship were encouraged to see the dynamic way that God could use them to serve Jesus as well. They were encouraged

to follow their vision and passion to serve in many ways, including teaching their children, giving women's Bible studies, being active in the prayer ministry, encouraging others and sharing the good news, even as Mary Magdalene did on resurrection morning. They also were leaders, working side by side with the men.

"The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed" (Titus 2:3-5).

My wife, Tania, has been such an incredible example for the women. She is a classic Proverbs 31 virtuous woman, filled with compassion to help others, teaching and serving day and night, and inspiring me with her devotion to our Lord Jesus. She continues to organize women's conferences, as well as teaching a Bible class every week. She also gives classes on how to bake and decorate cakes, design various crafts, and other practical ways the ladies can help provide finances for their families.

The key to a joy filled ministry is when everybody is fulfilling their unique place in the body of Christ. No one person is more important than the other; we are all members one of another. It is so much easier when people simply do what they enjoy doing.

### NEW LIFE IN THE TENT

We had our first Sunday church service the same weekend that we laid the pipe. That day we set up the chairs under a tree, which worked well, but the rainy season was coming and we knew we needed a tent for our growing congregation. At this time, I went to California for the annual pastors conference, and when I saw my friend, Brian Brodersen, I asked him if he knew anybody that might have a circus tent. He was the only person I had asked. I don't know why, but it just popped into my mind when I saw him. He smiled, turned around and introduced me to George Bryson, who had a church-planting

ministry in Russia. It turned out that George had just donated a circus tent that he had used in Russia, and he felt, at that moment, it needed to go to Mexico for our fellowship. Another friend, a Mexican businessman, loaded the tent into a semi-trailer he was using to bring commercial kitchen equipment into Mexico. He brought the tent all the way from California to our property for free.

We erected the tent on our property and everybody in town was talking about what God was doing with a crazy group of Christians that utilized music, clowns, balloons and magic shows. Not only that, dads were playing soccer with their kids while moms were frying up delicious chicken tacos for the families. Christianity is not only an adventure—it should also be fun. And it is when we do it biblically.

So many people fell in love with Jesus in our tent. Gypsies can be found in many parts of the world, and one of them showed up at our fellowship and offered to read my palm for free. I let her look at my hand, and then I took her hand and shared about her future, that she needed Jesus and His forgiveness in her life. She was touched and told me that in her community there had been Christians but many had fallen away. She invited me to come and pray for the sick wife of the patriarch of these gypsies. When I went to pray for her, the patriarch was so touched by the Lord he personally requested for me to share with all those in his community. The next Sunday, we sent a bus to pick up the entire community of gypsies to drive them to our tent so they could come and worship with us. After our little six-year-old girl, Debbie, heard about how I had shared with one of the gypsies, she offered to read the palms for all of our visitors.

My health was slipping and I needed to take a break, so I invited a friend, Larry Hernandez, to come down and start a School of Evangelism, like the one I had attended in San Diego. I offered him and his wife the use of our house and our car for four months, and I asked if he would also fill in for me on Sundays. He agreed, so he and I traded lives. Our family traveled up to San Diego, where we lived in his one-bedroom apartment and led the Spanish-speaking fellowship

he had started in Pacific Beach. It was also a joy to teach the congregation there. We had so much fun, in fact, that we decided to start two new fellowships in San Diego, California: a Spanish-speaking fellowship called Horizon in Claremont and another one at the Park Chapel downtown. Twenty years later the Spanish fellowship continues to meet there in Claremont.

As a family we ministered to the community, but during this time I really drew close to my wife, Tania, and our two small children. I built a bat cave out of plywood in Larry's living room so Jonathan and Debbie would have a place to sleep at night. How they loved their hideout! The apartment complex had a swimming pool and was near the beach. Soon our children learned to swim and we had an unforgettable time at the beach just hanging out as a family. I knew that sometimes children of pastors and missionaries have difficulties growing up in the church, so my family has always been a high priority to me. So much so that I invented a variant of Mark 8:36, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own family?"

Larry enjoyed his time in Queretaro so much that he and his family decided to stay and join the ministry. He had fallen in love with the beautiful people there. He started the Bible school and we began to train up workers that would later go out around the country. We returned as a family and I continued to pastor the fellowship in Queretaro and I was able to provide for my mother-in-law. We were able to buy her a little home, and our daughter, Angelica, lived with her. She later told me that those were the happiest years of her life.

"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:36-38).

## CHAPTER 13

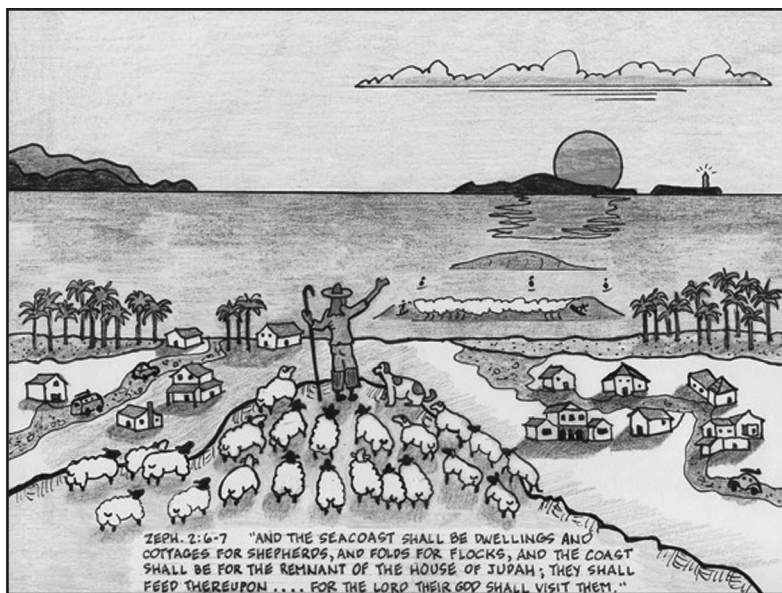
# OPTIMUM BLESSING

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9).

In 1996 I visited the city of Ensenada to teach at a pastors and leaders conference prior to our Festival of Life outreach. There were about 600 people in a two-story hotel ballroom and the place was packed. I felt the power and presence of the Holy Spirit as God spoke through me. I shared that He was going to do a great work in our days—so great that we wouldn’t believe it even if God had told it to us personally. The Lord was going to visit this city with His great power. Right at that very moment I was speaking to the people, the electricity went out over the entire state. The hotel was totally and utterly pitch-black. You couldn’t see your hand in front of your face.

I felt my way through to the middle of the ballroom where I could speak without the sound system. I couldn’t see my Bible, but I shared boldly how God was to pour out His Spirit on the city of Ensenada and bring a new day to Mexico. I sensed that Jesus wanted to do something great to bring people to the cross and bring permanent change to the city.

Right after the meeting, the electricity came back on and I was able to talk and meet with many of the people. After everybody had left I remember walking down the stairs thinking, *What a lucky guy whoever gets to pastor in this city.* There was absolutely no way I would ever leave the glorious fellowship in Queretaro. Not in a million years. Or so I thought.



In January 1997 I contracted acute pneumonia. The first week in bed was a nice break from my hectic schedule. But during the second week as I continued to get worse, I began to think about my declining health and ways that had always helped me in the past to get better. We had been living at an altitude of over 7,000 feet on Mexico's central plateau for many years. Whenever we would travel to areas at sea level, there was more oxygen. This always helped me whenever I got too physically weak to continue ministering.

As was our custom, we were going through the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation during our Sunday services. We were, at the time, in the book of Zephaniah, and as I was studying I read, "And the seacoast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks. And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon... for the Lord their God shall visit them" (Zephaniah 2:6-7).

The Lord spoke clearly to my heart to go down to the seacoast where there would be dwellings for shepherds (plural) and folds for flocks



(plural). There would be a new outpouring of God's Spirit, to train up multiple ministries and "shepherds," and multiple fellowships or "folds for flocks." The sheep would "feed" there, as they would be taught the Word of God—and not preached at. The word for "taught" in Spanish is *enseñada*. The sheep would be *enseñada* in Ensenada. That might not be clear to you, but it was sure clear to me. I really got excited when I read the last verse, "for the Lord their God shall visit them" —the visitation of God's Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, "If only you had recognized this day, the day of your visitation" (see Luke 19:44). The Israelites did not recognize that pivotal day and ended up killing their Messiah. They missed out because they did not recognize their day of visitation. Even so, a great conflict rose up in my heart because there was no way I wanted to leave my promised child, Isaac—the fellowship in Queretaro. But yet, knowing God's Word, I told Him that I was willing to give up my beloved fellowship in Queretaro, my Isaac, even as Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son. I knew that God gave Isaac back to Abraham. So I was hoping that all I had to do was *be willing* to give up my promised child, and God would give him back to me, as He was simply testing my heart.

But I distinctly heard God answer, "No. I want you to give up your beloved son, Isaac, as I have many more children for you." I continued to pray and reason with the Lord until He spoke to me again, "Do you want to do this the hard way or the easy way? Do you remember how I took my hand of blessing and protection off of your life in Mexico City, so that you would obey Me and move to a new city? Do you want Me to take My hand of blessing off of the church?" It is discouraging to argue with the Lord. You can never win. I have learned that obedience always yields the optimum blessing. God can bless you even if you don't obey His every command but it is not the optimal blessing. God saves the best for those that leave the choice to Him.

Jim Elliott, the martyred missionary said what choice is it to "give what you cannot keep to gain that which you cannot lose?" I have used that saying from time to time in my life, and it is true. Never settle for second best.

## FOLLOW GOD'S LEADING

In the beginning of the ministry, I would take great risks for the Lord and there were great rewards. But many times, as God blesses the ministry, we try to cut down the risks in order to avoid failure and disappointment. Before I committed my life to Christ, I was constantly compromising on little things. When I came to the Lord, I told Him that I would rather have Him kill me than for me to go back to a life where I would begin to compromise and make excuses. It is one thing to lay everything on the line when you have nothing to lose, but it is quite different when you have everything to lose. The conflict arises when our intellect tries to figure out how God can use us in the greatest way. But almost always God works in a way that we would have never thought of, and in the end there is far more fruit. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5).

As we seek God's will, it's good to follow the example of others who have gone before us on this journey of faith. After seventeen years of struggling in the ministry, Chuck Smith finally saw his church in Corona grow to 200 believers, twice as big as any church he had ever pastored previously. Finally he had achieved the success he had always dreamed. But then Pastor Chuck received an invitation to move back to Costa Mesa to lead a congregation of just twenty-five people who were contemplating closure of the church. Chuck felt led by the Spirit to leave his dream church and to move back to an area where he had previously failed. Add to that, to pastor a dying church. His wife, Kay, was absolutely shocked that Chuck would even consider doing such a thing. After years of struggling to feed a growing family, the fellowship in Corona was finally able to financially support their needs. She was so upset that Chuck had lost his mind she arranged for her husband to have lunch with a psychiatrist. It all just seemed so crazy.

But when Chuck and Kay obeyed the Lord and followed His leading, God poured out His Spirit and the Jesus People Movement was born and thousands of churches, including ours, were born—just because one faithful couple heard and obeyed God's voice. It was much like

the faith of Abraham, who was used by God to become the father of many nations.

Chuck was also a personal friend, who inspired me greatly by his example of being a humble servant. One time in Mexico City after a pastors conference, eight of us sat down at a restaurant in the airport, and we were in a hurry as the flight was leaving soon. As we were all talking, out of the corner of my eye I noticed Chuck say, “Oops, I forgot one.” He stood up and walked to the waitress station to get one more placement and silverware. What impressed me was that he had already brought seven placemats and set the silverware for seven people, and nobody even noticed. He never did things to draw attention to himself. His life has always been an inspiration to me.

So there I was—the Lord had asked me to turn over the church to a Mexican national once again and move my family to a new city. This was not a move that made any logical sense. How could it be strategic to leave the heart of the country and move north, just a few hours away from the border? To top it off, how can I argue with God when He also shared with me that He could do it the easy way or the hard way? My heart broke even though I knew that if I followed the Lord’s leading, that obedience would produce the optimum blessing.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones” (Proverbs 3:5-8).



# DOORS TO RADIO AND TV FLY OPEN

“A man’s heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps”  
(Proverbs 16:9).

## IN A HOME IN ENSENADA

In April 1997 I made my first exploratory trip to Ensenada to find a place to live. I met up with my old friends, Tomas and Maricela Shockey. Tomas had started his missionary career with us back in 1982 in our warehouse church. And now he was here to pray with me for God to pour out His Spirit. We climbed a rocky peak and prayed over the growing port city of 500,000 and we asked Jesus to do the work of planting a new church in Ensenada.

Over the next three days, I searched for a home for our family with a real estate agent. Although we had some monthly income coming in, there were no mortgages in Mexico at the time and one had to pay cash for a house. I also wanted to bless my family with two things they didn’t have in Queretaro: a small yard where the children could have a pet dog, and somewhere to put up a basketball hoop so I could teach my son the sport that I had enjoyed when I was young.

We drove from one neighborhood to the next neighborhood looking for a house that would work for us; however, because Ensenada was situated only seventy miles from the U.S. border, the city was poor and had little infrastructure. The houses I was looking at were all on dirt roads. I don’t mean a graded, gravel road, but a really rough, muddy road. If the windows were open, one would have to mop the floor over and over again every time a car drove by. I couldn’t subject my wife to that knowing she loved to keep a clean, spotless house.

After three solid days of looking at houses, tears streamed down my cheeks as reality set in that we would be moving from a beautiful,

modern, prosperous city to a semi-border town scarred by drug addicts and prostitutes living in poverty. It sure didn't seem like a very good place to raise two small children. I finally asked the real estate agent to show me some houses along paved streets, and to show me some houses near the ocean, even if I couldn't afford them.

The first house we saw was a three-bedroom for \$55,000. As we got out of the car and the owner saw the agent, she immediately began screaming at her for not showing her house to a single client in two years. She was furious and then turned to me and said, "So do you want to buy my house?" I was still shaking from her barrage of verbal assaults and I quickly got back into the agent's car. The real estate agent told me she had another listing from two years prior, but she didn't know if the house was still for sale.

We drove up the hill to an unfinished two-bedroom house with an ocean view. As we parked in front of this white one-story home, we noticed a pickup truck in the driveway, loaded up with furniture. We knocked on the door and an American greeted us with a smile. They were renting the house and apparently the owners had taken down the for-sale sign. As I scanned the living room, I noticed a wood carving of the name Jesus. I picked it up and turned to the gentleman and said, "Here is a name I love with all my heart." He said, "So do we. We are Christians." I responded, "Well, I am a pastor from southern Mexico and we are moving here to plant a church." They responded, "We are missionaries." Amazing. Then came the most unbelievable part. The missionary said, "Two years ago when we rented the house, the owner desperately wanted to sell us the property. He said we could pay him \$300 a month for fifteen years and the house would be ours." But since they were Americans, they couldn't own the house, and they were actually moving out. I asked for the name and phone number of the owner.

I called the owner of this house, Steve, who lived in San Diego. When I started talking, he asked me why I wanted to buy his house. I told him my story and he broke in suddenly, shouting, "Juan, is that you?" I said, "Which Steve is this?" It was my friend Steve Beck, a

missionary from my home church that I had actually helped in the real estate transaction when he had purchased a house in Mazatlan years prior. And now my friend was in a precarious situation because as an American, his house in Ensenada was still in the previous owner's name. He gladly sold me the house for \$46,000, which I paid him \$300 per month interest-free. Going back to the previous owner, our real estate agent was able to get them to sign the title over to us.

God had supernaturally provided us with a home on a paved street, where we could put up a basketball hoop on the telephone pole. Plus it had a yard so we could have a dog—actually we got two dogs. Before we started the new church, we spent the next six months finishing the upstairs construction of this house, turning it into a great four-bedroom home with an ocean view. It was a very loving gesture by a wonderful Lord, who wanted to bless us in ways we couldn't have dreamed in our new city of Ensenada.

Instead of immediately starting a Bible study, I took a short break. I worked on the house and taught in various churches on the weekends. This city was a real culture shock for our family. The school where our children were enrolled back in Queretaro was an incredible learning environment, where the children were challenged toward excellence, both academically and morally. The schools in Ensenada at this time, however, offered only half the instructional hours per week. Although we felt overwhelmed, our only option was to home school. We signed up for a program from Florida, where our kids watched videos and could feel part of an actual classroom in a Christian school. This turned out to be highly beneficial for us, as we were able to travel as a missionary family and do things we couldn't have done if they were enrolled in a traditional school.

## EVANGELISM IN ENSENADA

After having been 2,000 miles away from the churches that had supported us, we were now able to renew relationships since we were only a few hours driving distance from California. Several fellowships took us on as their missionary. One ministry in particular ended up

revolutionizing our lives. Pastor Ricky Ryan and missions pastor, Jim Stretchberry, shared something with me that changed my whole concept of missions.

One day Ricky asked me, “What can we do to make *your* dream come true?” That question knocked me off balance. I had always tried to be a blessing to the U.S. churches and endeavored to make *their* mission dreams come true. What was my dream? I had to really think about that because nobody had ever asked me.

I shared with Ricky that I thought it would be a great idea to bring to our city one of the top recording artists in Latin America, Yuri, who had received Christ and was a part of our Festival of Life team. So Ricky’s church invested \$30,000 for us to put on a citywide outreach to help plant our church in Ensenada. On top of this, their church also built ten houses in two weeks that we could give to the poor. We also did a surf outreach for the local surf community. We asked Britt Merrick, the son of the top surfboard maker in the world, to speak. As we set up on the beach, we held an exhibition and gave away a free surfboard, then Britt shared about the love of Jesus to the beach community there in Ensenada. Britt was enthusiastic and won the people’s hearts and was used by God to bring many to the Lord. Today, Britt pastors his own church in Santa Barbara, California called Reality, and has also started a network of Reality churches that is reaching a whole new generation of young people.

The love of God had arrived in Ensenada and there was a buzz in the city. Hours before we opened the theater for the first concert, there was a mile-long line of people just waiting to come in. You could sense the presence of the Holy Spirit as people came to hear how God had radically changed Yuri’s life and they openly responded to Pastor Ricky Ryan’s message of hope.

The next day those who came forward were invited to the San Nicolas Hotel ballroom, where we would have our first Sunday morning service. We had a good crowd of about 100 or so people. However, the



next Sunday there was only a handful. Still, there was no question in my mind that God was going to do a wonderful work.

### A THRIVING FELLOWSHIP

Tomas Shockey brought his forty abandoned children from his orphanage to our church service, and we had lively kids running around the hotel having a great time. He and his wife, Maricela, had been praying for several years, along with Pastor Jeff Johnson, for a church to be planted in Ensenada.

Lisa Heit and Jeannie Sue Phlegley, missionaries from California, had started a battered women's shelter an hour-and-a-half south of us, in a town called San Vicente. They brought the women and twenty-five kids in an old school bus all the way to Ensenada for our services. What I didn't know was that these missionary ladies had also prayed for a Bible-teaching church to be started in Ensenada and had even mentioned my name in prayer. "If You have to bring Juan all the way from central Mexico, then do it." So we had a thriving children's ministry and a few adults.

We moved the fellowship to a smaller room in the hotel, and we began to simply teach the Word simply, and by then two of the graduates from our School of Evangelism had moved to Ensenada. At the same time, Gerry Brown, of the U-Turn For Christ ministries, asked me to supply him with some men who could help him open a branch of his ministry in Ensenada. So we sent our two graduates where U-Turn For Christ found a property to open a residential drug and alcohol restoration program in our city. I had never felt very comfortable in the whole drug addict rehab culture, but I sensed there was a great need in our city for such a restoration ministry for men whose lives had been destroyed by drug and alcohol addictions. Soon a dozen or so men from U-Turn For Christ volunteered their time for our church.

As we outgrew the room in the hotel, we moved the fellowship across the street to a roller skating rink for the Sunday services. We had a 9:00 a.m. Bible study in English and an 11:00 a.m. Bible study in

Spanish. We used the room in the hotel for the midweek study and for the morning English service, after which we would have to quickly pack up the sound system and move the chairs across the street for the Spanish service. The U-Turn For Christ men provided all the manpower we needed to set up and break down before the roller rink opened for skaters at 12:30 p.m.

We had many wonderful outreaches in the roller skating rink with everybody in the fellowship involved in some kind of ministry. One young man who owned a bicycle shop did an outreach where people from the city could bring in their bikes to get them fixed for free. He was using his gift to reach people for Jesus. If every Christian saw their unique skills as an opportunity to influence people for Jesus, then Christianity could explode worldwide.

### A CRAZY VENTURE OF FAITH

The owner of the roller skating rink wanted to double the rent she was charging us, in hopes that we would, in turn, decide to take over the entire lease. We got together with the men in our church for a weekend retreat to fast and seek the Lord for His direction concerning the facility for our growing fellowship.

The next Sunday I prayed for a sign from the Lord. I was thinking a dollar sign, but that didn't happen as the offerings were counted. After the service, however, a young believer told me about a Christian family who was selling a property downtown that had previously been used for a flea market. They were willing to negotiate the terms if the prospective buyers were Christians. I talked to the owners and they wanted \$400,000 cash for the half-acre property that was situated on a corner by the bus station. I knew that was impossible so I looked for other options. I had found a lot half that size for only \$125,000. The owner was even willing to finance the purchase over eighteen months, which would be a big help.

Right around this time a friend of mine, David Guzik, a pastor in Simi Valley, California came down for a visit. I asked him to pray with me

about the two properties that we were considering to purchase. I had the faith to buy the land selling at \$125,000 but I knew there was no way we could even consider the larger \$400,000 property. I brought David to the larger lot first, the one we could never afford, and we prayed. I then drove him to the smaller property, but as soon as he saw it he bluntly said, "I'm not even going to pray for this place." I retorted, "Well then, you better put your money where your mouth is." He just laughed. But inwardly my stomach was tied in knots, and I felt trapped.

When you become broken and you're called to serve the Lord, your life is not your own. You don't have the option of taking the easy street. If God guides, God provides. I was forced to ask the question: Was the Lord leading us into this crazy venture of faith? Is it not faith to believe God to do the impossible? Would it bring joy to the heart of Jesus? Or would we wind up ashamed and ruined?

I've learned that God uses the least likely candidates to do His work. Just look at some of the characters in the Bible that the Lord used. He even spoke through a donkey, so there's hope for us all.

When we started the new Spanish fellowship in San Diego in 1994, a man from Orange County brought his family down to hear me speak. This businessman, Sam Stuckey, along with his wife, Pat, invited me to lunch after the Sunday morning service. He said that I could choose any of the nicest restaurants and I chose Taco Bell. He didn't believe I was serious, but I told him I enjoyed eating American food when I was in the U.S. He laughed, and we went to eat a taco with ground beef, American cheese and lettuce...three things you won't find in a Mexican taco.

After lunch Sam shared with me that he and his wife wanted to move to Ensenada, live in a tiny apartment and help us in the ministry. Sam was over sixty years old with a very serious heart disease and rheumatoid arthritis. He had no Bible training other than faithfully attending church. Would he ever qualify to be a missionary with an established organization? Never. He could die at any moment—and

if that happened, how would we ever get the body back to the U.S.? But with God, all things are possible. After much consideration in prayer, I concluded there was nothing Sam could physically do on the mission field, but if Jesus was truly calling him to come to Ensenada, he needed to obey.

Sam and his family helped us to expand our vision for the ministry. As we prayed, Sam told me we should purchase the large downtown property, and that if the owners were really Christians, then they would negotiate the terms to sell their property. Sam asked how far down the sellers would bring the price. I told him that they already had a \$300,000 cash offer. So he wisely said, “Do you have faith to put \$50,000 down and pay \$50,000 a year for five years?” Instantly I felt God’s anointing to believe and joyfully responded, “Yes.”

As we were driving over to meet the sellers of the property, Sam grabbed my arm and said, “Don’t make the offer we talked about. Offer them \$25,000 down,” which was all the money we had anyway. “Then the first year we would pay \$25,000, then two years at \$50,000 a year and then \$75,000 the last two years, so we could pay more as the church grew.” I told Sam that offer would be insulting to the owners and it would make them angry. He told me to do it anyway, saying that they could then counter with paying \$50,000 a year. I asked, “What do we do if they accept the offer of \$50,000 down and we don’t have it?” Sam answered, “I’m going to cover the \$30,000 extra for the down payment and closing costs.” I was speechless.

I went in by myself to present the offer. And just as I had surmised, they were furious and stormed out of the office. I heard them yelling and arguing for twenty minutes, but then they finally came back in and said, “Back in 1986 we received a prophecy that God would build a large church on this property and that God would bless the city. So we’re willing to receive \$50,000 down and \$50,000 a year for five years with no interest.” The miracle was complete—or was it? Where on earth would we come up with that much money for five years?

We had shipped the circus tent that we used for our previous church to the city of Ensenada. We laid it on the ground on our new property and scrubbed it with soap and water. The downtown circus tent became quite the sensation. People came in thinking the circus had come to town, and many of them stayed as they enjoyed the festive atmosphere. Even as the commercial fishermen captured the beautiful bluefin tuna in their nets in this area of Baja California, the Lord was opening a new door to bring in His catch.

### USING RADIO TO ATTRACT THE PEOPLE

I had briefly transmitted a Bible-teaching show on the radio in Tijuana back in 1981. At the time, the sister of the president, Lopez Portillo, had ordered a strict elimination of any radio programs that mentioned God. But in 1998 the owner of the Enciso radio chain in Tijuana approached me about doing a Bible-teaching show on her station, Radio Rancherita, in Ensenada. She had heard about our ministry and saw a way to boost the ratings of the station there. It was totally an experiment because there weren't any regular Christian radio shows on the air at that time.

We started teaching on a live radio show Monday through Friday at 8:00 p.m. It was quite an adjustment for me to talk to a completely secular audience, but I was still able to communicate the good news to them. I imagined the people who were listening. I could visualize a taxicab driver listening on his car radio, or a single mother tuning in on a small radio balanced on a table that wobbled on a dirt floor, in a shack built on a rocky hill overlooking the city. Maybe there was a factory worker listening on his headphones, or what if the radio program was the background music in a bar located in the bad part of town. Most likely the listeners tuning in were simply fans of the popular Mexican ranch style music, wherever they happened to be.

The people who tuned in to our show tended to be from the poor multitudes. This music brought solace from their harsh and impoverished lives. Knowing that the Mexican fiesta has always been the centerpiece of the colorful Latin culture, I tried to sneak into their world to bring

them a spiritual fiesta. As I taught through the gospel of Mark, I highlighted extraordinary and spectacular events that characterized the life of Jesus. He was a friend to the poor and it fit right in with the traditional religious concept of a Jesus who was accessible to all men. But I taught that Jesus was not dead; He was alive and full of joy.

Since I simply talked about Jesus, through the Bible, many people assumed I was a Catholic priest. Years later, a young lady in our church was sharing with one of her nursing student friends. She invited her friend to our church, but her friend said that she was a Catholic who was very excited about her faith and was growing spiritually. She said her life had been transformed by listening to the priest, Father Juan Domingo, on the radio. Now, I never took that title, but some people just assumed that if I was talking about God, I must have been a priest.

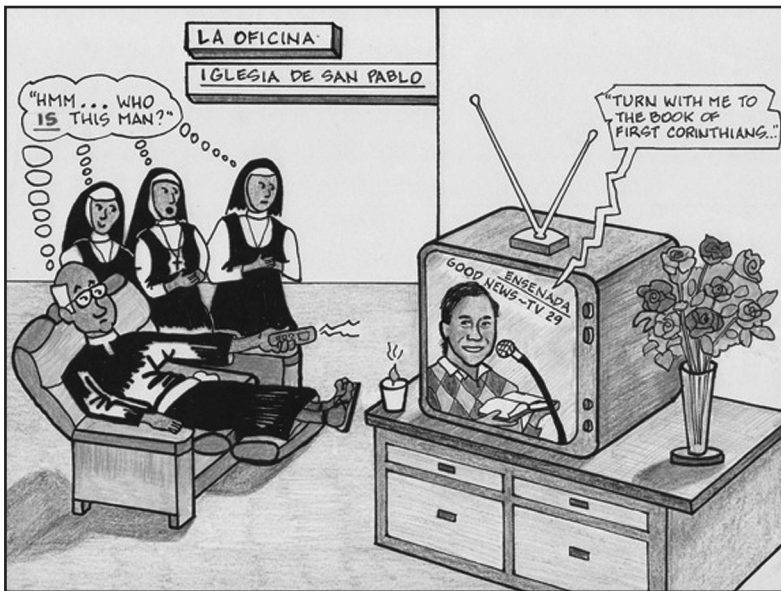
The radio ministry had reached people of all social classes, but in our city 70 percent of the people were very poor. It became my challenge to fully identify with them, speak their language, and talk about issues that they faced daily. The greatest compliment I have ever received was from a man selling popsicles from a cart on a downtown street. He walked up to me with a huge smile and took my hand. Through a tear in his eye, he looked square at me and declared, "No one has understood the plight of our people and comprehended my life better than you. I know that what you say is true because it has changed my life."

In order to improve my teaching skill, I prayed for the Lord to help me completely enter the mind of the listeners. I wanted to see their faces as I talked and taught the Word of God. And after every radio show, I was left completely exhausted from concentrating and praying as I spoke to the people.

## GOOD NEWS ON TELEVISION

It was January 1, 2000. At the turning of the new year, many people were expecting the power to go out and computers to fail. I remember that I was lying in my bed with my Bible open, asking God for His direction for the coming year. The telephone rang and my Adventist

friend, Javier, whose family was involved in secular radio and TV, was on the line. He told me that one of the stations wanted to put my radio show on TV. I said that would be awesome but that we didn't have any money for that. We were building our facility and paying off the land. He said, "Don't worry about the money, we will work something out." I couldn't believe it. How cool was that!



My son, Jonathan, who was only eleven years old at the time, and quite the computer whiz, quickly learned how to be the cameraman and editor for our TV show called "Good News." Digital video cameras were just coming onto the scene. With the digital format, we were able to download the shows into the computer. Not even the commercial stations were doing that at the time. This way, we could produce and edit the TV shows for free doing it ourselves. This gave us the opportunity to add all kinds of visual and audio effects; and for my son, it was as if he was playing the latest videogame. He would come back from skateboarding and we would set up the lighting, cameras and microphones for the set. We would have special guests, both celebrities and people from our community. I wanted people to

see that Christianity wasn't a bunch of people doing religious stuff in a building, but rather doctors, musicians or athletes living out their faith in our city.

As I had been interviewed on TV many times before, I'd always felt a certain magic and connection when I was sharing. And now my home city had opened the door and they began to promote my TV show to attract more viewers to their station. The show was so successful that the number one station, Televisa, invited me to take my show to their studio. They offered me a slot at 6:00 p.m. on Saturdays, when people were coming home from work, and before they would go out on the town. The show had become a sensation. It was before reality TV, but had a similar effect, because Christianity had not been talked about so publicly before. Plus we simply had fun and people sensed that.

It is important to note that in Ensenada, 80 percent of the people only had broadcast TV. Only a few people had cable or satellite television, which means there were approximately 400,000 people watching prime time with only five viewing choices, our program being one of them.

## FROM ENSENADA TO THE WORLD

After a couple of years, the station that first began broadcasting our show came back to me and asked what it would take to bring the show back to their channel. I said, "Why would I want to leave the number one station?" They offered to take my show Monday through Friday during prime time, giving me any broadcast time that I wanted, so I took the 8:00 p.m. slot. Then they said they were going to promote the show through ads on their radio chain and in the two local newspapers. The print ad read, "Don't miss the show, Good News, as your family will be inspired." They paid for a quarter page, full-color ad in the papers. More and more people began to watch the show and the station was really happy. On the air they announced their station as TV 29 Ensenada, the spiritual capital of Baja California.



We were the first Spanish-speaking ministry to produce digital video, teaching through the whole Bible, book by book, chapter by chapter. Ken Zenk, who was a computer technician for a hospital in California, moved down to Ensenada and designed a website to upload all our Bible teaching, making it available for free anywhere in the world. So now our program was over the Internet. We had Spanish-speaking people studying through the Bible with us from every continent around the world.

We later built our own TV studio at our facility to record the shows. From there we continued producing our daily show and eventually expanded it to cover the whole state by cable TV. Today we are currently on broadcast TV as well as cable six days a week during prime time with the longest running local TV show on the air.

“The word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24).



## CHAPTER 15

# FINDING TRUE JOY

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

Our yellow-and-white circus tent billowed in the cool ocean breeze on a city corner in the bustling port city of Ensenada, Mexico. Since the majority of the people depend on public transportation, we always saw a parade of shoppers, merchants, students, and factory and farm workers stroll past the tent on their way to the bus station. And we saw a lot of wild characters come in off the street.

One day a thin, scrawny, bearded old man came in with something that looked like a doctor's bag. I watched him out of the corner of my eye while I was teaching the Sunday message. Nobody else could see him because he walked into the far back portion of the auditorium. He began taking things out of his bag, and set them up on an altar, which was part of a ritualistic satanic worship activity. This man was a witch doctor. He was dancing around, holding things over his head and waving them around. As I continued teaching the Bible study, this guy was casting spells on me and the people in the church, without them even knowing he was there. Suddenly this man turned around and just walked out and I didn't see him again. After the Bible study, I met with the ushers instructing them to keep an eye out for any more troublemakers. Then two years later at a Wednesday night Bible study, this same man came into our service and publicly shared his testimony how he had received Christ from watching our TV show. God has always amazed me.

## TRANSFORMED LIVES

Once a lawyer named Jesus visited us in our tent, after listening to the radio show and learning where I taught the Bible weekly. He waited

for me to say something about politics, in order to have me arrested. He sat there in the tent listening to me teach the Bible week after week. The next thing I knew, his daughter, a beautiful young lady who had a prosthetic leg and worked in prostitution, started coming to the studies as well. They both received the Lord and there was great joy among the angels in the heavenly city.

Years later, this lawyer became sick due to diabetes and he had to have his leg amputated. He became disabled and couldn't work, causing him to lose all of his money and possessions. At the time, Pastor John Duncan, whose church had been supporting us for many years, donated an electric wheelchair that his wife with MS no longer used. Our friend Jesus would cruise down the city streets (literally in the street since Ensenada didn't have wheelchair ramps on the curbs) in his electric wheelchair with a big smile, to come to the Bible studies. When the battery finally wore out, we rigged up a car battery and he kept coming for the rest of his life. A missionary who was with us at the time, Victor, became a close personal friend to him and was with Jesus the night he went home to be with the Lord Jesus. This lawyer, who had originally meant evil, was ushered into heaven, carried by a legion of angels.

A retired medical doctor had attended church religiously his whole life, but had never been born again...until he started attending our church tent in Ensenada. He not only was transformed, but he prayed out loud and began singing songs to the Lord for the first time in his life at the age of eighty-five years old. Another elderly lady, Carmen, was a staunch rebel and threatened people with her cane when they came near her. She too came to Jesus when she attended one of our home Bible studies and was baptized at the age of ninety-four.

So many people's lives were being transformed. If we were to write about each one of their stories, it would fill the pages of another book.

The church continued to grow, and by faith we decided to start building our main auditorium that would become our sanctuary. We had

originally planned to stay in the tent until the land was paid off in five years. However, we had some retired Americans in our English service who contributed from earnings they made from their “.com” tech stocks and those contributions provided funds for us to keep on building. When the bubble burst and the stocks crashed, these individuals had made the best investment possible. Today they are thrilled that they were able to use their material blessings to advance God’s kingdom.

### BUILDING PLANS AND GOD’S PROVISIONS

A professor from Harvard University had visited our church in Queretaro years prior, and she was amazed at how much we were able to do without any financing but by simply trusting in the Lord. She was now a professor at Stanford University and she wanted to help us design a facility for our growing fellowship, as well as a center for a community outreach. She invited the dean of the Department of Architecture and Design from Stanford to come down and see first-hand the work we were doing helping people with special needs, abandoned children and the poor. When we went out to eat breakfast at an oceanfront restaurant, I paused before eating, as did my professor friend, and I looked at the dean and I asked her if it was okay if I thanked God for the food and to bless it before we ate. She hesitated a moment and then said, “Sure.”

Our first stop with the dean was at our home for abandoned children on the south side of town. She met Tomas and Maricela, and the children mobbed her, grabbing her legs and hugging her with huge smiles on their faces. She fell in love with them and what we were doing. She paid for me to fly up to Stanford University to introduce me to the architects who were working to expand their campus. Once there, we met to set up teams to help in our building project, a task that she assigned to her students. They presented me with their finished projects that had some very innovative ideas. The architects involved in the construction of the University also gave us great ideas and designs. Here we were, a church in Mexico without any money, and some of the world’s best architects were designing our facility.

The next night, the dean invited me to her lovely, large home in Palo Alto. She had invited many of the professors from her department so they could meet me. We all sat around a very long dining room table for about sixteen people. Right before we started to eat, she motioned to me and said, "Can you please give the thank you to God for the food?" Later I had a chance to share the gospel with her and she accepted the Lord, and soon after she became involved in a church in her area.

After meeting with the Stanford architects, they sent down an intern student, along with a licensed architect from the State of Washington, Doug Weeks, who stayed with us and generously donated their time to help us draw up our blueprints. We were then faced with the challenge to find a steel building for the auditorium/sanctuary. It needed to be one hundred thirty feet long by seventy feet wide and twenty-five feet tall, according to the blueprints. One of the men in our church noticed an unassembled steel structure on the side of the highway south of town. He investigated and found the owner to see if he wanted to sell it. We purchased the entire building that included the plywood and air-conditioning units, all for \$20,000. As we measured the building to see what the dimensions were, it turned out to be the exact size we needed.

Since we used adobe block for the walls instead of the metal siding, we had enough surplus materials to roof one of our mission churches, as well as the auditorium at the U-Turn For Christ ranch. It was as if Jesus saved the scraps of bread, after feeding the 5,000, and made bread pudding for the next day's meal.

After just one year in the tent, we had erected the steel structure with a metal roof, doing the labor ourselves, just like we did with our other construction projects. We really didn't know what we were doing, but as the crane drove onto our property to help set the huge steel beams, at that very moment a man just happened to walk in off the street and told us he could help assemble the steel building. God provides supernaturally in His perfect timing. He didn't have the right clothes

for the job, but we happened to have a pair of overalls that he stepped into and zipped up, fitting perfectly. A few days earlier somebody had donated a box of clothes that “just happened” to have work overalls for construction.

It's simply amazing to see the supernatural provision of God. Another time I remember clearly one day when we were pouring concrete for the floor with several cement trucks. The hoses we were using struck a leak and it was ruining the freshly poured concrete. Right at that precise moment, a pickup truck arrived from California with three brand-new hoses that they wanted to donate for a construction project. They had no idea we needed them at that exact moment. Every time we needed something, God provided those very precise tools at the very moment they were needed. Supplies that we didn't even know we needed at the time would mysteriously arrive in boxes. Stories could go on and on about how God supernaturally made provision for every single detail of this venture of faith.

The adobe brick sanctuary went up, block by block, all 30,000 of them. It took three years to complete as we worked slowly, and as the money came in. And when the tent became uncomfortable in the heat, wind and rain, it provided the motivation for the people to help us out and get involved.

Finally the day came when we had the support beams and roof assembled, even though the walls were only three feet high at the time. We took advantage of the great, temperate climate of this beach city and decided to move out of the tent and under the roof. We were basically outside with just the roof for shade. On our one-year anniversary of starting the church, we had moved onto our property into the tent. On our second anniversary, we brought down the tent. It was no longer needed as we moved into our building. It was quite a celebration, as each one of the families grabbed one of the eighty support ropes, and then two of us went into the tent and unscrewed the center tent posts. Then with a shout of “Praise the Lord!” everybody pulled on the ropes and we lowered the main tent posts. It was like something right

out of the book of Exodus. Each family was able to keep their piece of the rope as a souvenir which some still have today.

### SCAFFOLDING MISSIONARIES

In previous construction projects, I had been the head foreman. But now with my growing responsibilities, that was impossible. Once again, the Lord would provide a person who apparently would be the least likely person for the task. Karen Holdcraft, a young lady who had worked in construction in California, volunteered to be the construction supervisor, again a missionary without formal training, but with a huge heart to serve.

Karen's sweet disposition, willingness to learn how to do things in a new way, dedication to excellence and incredible work ethic, inspired us all. When it was time for us to pour the concrete for the floor of our gymnasium/sanctuary, she was up all night with a mission team breaking up the old concrete and preparing to receive the ten cement trucks that were arriving the next morning. Karen's gift was not only getting a volunteer team to work all night, but doing it joyfully. They were rewarded with the satisfaction of seeing the job completed on time and on budget. These teams will carry these memories the rest of their lives, as they remember their sacrifice in helping build a facility where multitudes would come to know Jesus and worship Him. Karen later went on to be a missionary in Nicaragua, Brazil, Germany and Haiti. Many missionaries have gotten their start with us and have later been inspired to travel around the world.

Missionaries should be like scaffolding, such that when the building is done, the scaffolding is moved on to the next project location. So we started sending out the construction teams to help build new mission churches that needed to be planted.

### EXPRESSING GOD'S DESIGN

During one Easter week, different families from the church laid the rock floor for our courtyard. We explained how to break up pieces of colored tile to lay them in the grout, and then let them be creative.



Our courtyard wound up being the most beautiful part of the facility, as families painstakingly laid each broken piece of tile and each piece of the heavy slate rock.

We also designed two giant 18' x 18' doors to open from the sanctuary to the courtyard. These sliding doors, with two inches of solid foam inside them, would open up in the summer to give a truly outdoor experience to the worship service, as well as take advantage of the cool sea breeze for natural air-conditioning.

The doors in Solomon's Temple had palm trees, flowers and cherubim engraved into the wood. We hand carved these massive wood doors with two palm trees leaning over and touching in the middle, looking down on an island full of flowers. Since we couldn't carve cherubim, we placed a beautiful Aztec sun above the palm trees. I had hand-drawn the picture on a plastic transparency, and then we projected the image on the doors, traced the design and then the woodcarver did the rest. Lastly we painted the sun, the trees and flowers with vibrant Mexican colors.

“And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship” (Exodus 31:3-5).

I believe God has given us the world and He has placed the paintbrush in our hands, allowing us to let the creative juices flow in order to create something that comes from His heart, involving people to express their faith in the community. Many churches only exercise their faith inside of the building. Christianity is so much more than that.

One of the most beautiful sights in our city is the pristine coastline, with the jagged rock cliffs jutting out from the deep blue ocean. When I saw that somebody had put graffiti on some of these big, beautiful rocks, right at the entrance to the city, God gave me an idea. One Saturday morning, volunteers from our church brought ropes and

paintbrushes and we scaled down the rock cliffs on little dirt trails, and secured ourselves with ropes. As we sang and praised the Lord, we turned these rocks from fluorescent orange, green and yellow back into the natural shades of gray and brown. Juan Hussong, the great-grandson of the founders of the famous bar that bears his name, purchased pizzas for all of us. The mayor and city council were also thrilled that we took the initiative to confront the problems of this touristic city, as well as preserving God's beautiful creation.

But the Devil doesn't give up easily and the graffiti went right back up on these beautiful rock formations. These confused young people didn't understand (or maybe they did) how they were ruining God's handiwork and defacing the city. So we went up there and removed the graffiti again.

When the garage door to our home was marked with graffiti, I painted over it the next day, so the kids wouldn't have the satisfaction of marking their territory. But a couple of nights later they came back and spray-painted their message again. Just like before, the next morning, I got my roller out and painted over it. This went on eleven times. Once I nailed a piece of cardboard, letting the troubled youth know, "Jesus loves you." They painted a black X over my cardboard sign and painted graffiti to their heart's content. As the battle continued, I was going to show them that the Devil would not win and that we would be persistent. After covering the graffiti the twelfth time, they never ever came back.

## SERVING THE COMMUNITY

One of the first activities we had when our gymnasium/auditorium was finished was to start an annual wheelchair basketball tournament. Teams came from Mexicali, Tijuana, Los Angeles and Ensenada. When we built our facility, it was constructed for the physically challenged to enjoy. All the bathroom stalls were extra wide and there are no curbs or steps. We made this a great celebration, setting up our courtyard with tables and serving tantalizing four-course meals for the visiting disabled athletes. They also spent the night so we set up cots in the ground floor classrooms.

Since Ensenada is a tourist city, it bursts with many fine-dining restaurants. Some of the top chefs became Christians at our fellowship, and we put them to work fixing some exquisite food for our wheelchair visitors and their families. I joined our leadership team in serving the tables, and it was so much fun. I sat down with them and challenged them to arm wrestle. These men had powerful arms and I stuck my skinny arm out, put on a determined face and pushed as hard as I could. They laughed and let me push for a while, before gently pushing my arm over against the table. I told them I would lift weights and beat them the next year, but of course I never did.

We had trophies for the winners and awards for every participant. After several years of putting on this event, the city officials took over the event and expanded it with other sports for the Ensenada Special Olympic games, holding it in the municipal arena and track stadium. We continued to prepare thousands of meals for them and share God's incredible love. It is amazing to see how much can get done if it doesn't matter who gets the credit.

Griselda, or Gris, as she likes to be called, was one of the local basketball players. Her legs were completely amputated at the hip and she was strapped into a wheelchair. As she competed right along next to the men, I noticed her determination and began encouraging and cheering her on. Soon we began to have conversations and I was able to pray with her to receive Christ. She became a part of our fellowship and eventually she launched her own nonprofit organization helping special needs people in our city. Her sister also came to the Lord and became involved with her ministry. What joy I always had when I saw them together, smiling from ear to ear.

We also set up skateboard ramps in our auditorium and held outreaches with rock bands for the youth. The TV news would always follow these community activities, which in turn, made a statement to our city—that we love people and want to help everybody. We transformed our facility into a huge, free medical clinic each year. Today, over 1,400 people have come out for their dental and medical needs. We give out

free medicine and while people wait to see the doctors in the auditorium, we show Christian movies with an evangelistic message.

During this time the mayor of Ensenada, Daniel Quintero, along with his wife would walk with me in the mornings along the beach, as I gave them Bible studies catered to their pressure-filled lives. Many leaders and celebrities need private one-on-one discipleship since they have such varied commitments and schedules. But when leaders are touched by God's love, they can help so many people in their circles of influence, something that we will never achieve. Many times, if we want to bring lasting changes to the community, we must reach specific community and business leaders. We want to instill in them a heart to help, rather than take advantage of people in their use of authority. This opened the door for us to start a ministry for police officers.

Word traveled really fast on the street, such as when a thief came into our Sunday service and stole a lady's purse from her chair, and our ushers grabbed him and held him in the men's room. When I heard what had happened I called some of my police friends, and they came and took care of the guy. The message went out to anybody on the streets who might be considering coming into God's house and hurting one of God's sheep, "Don't even think about messing with God's people."

One of the most popular ministries still going strong today is the outreach to the destitute and homeless. Every Tuesday morning our church kitchen is filled with volunteers, preparing food to take to those living under bridges, in rock caves along the coast, or living under tarps on abandoned lots. After the food is served, one of the team shares the Word of God and many people have been rescued spiritually through this ministry.

We also started a surf school on Saturday mornings. The surfboards and wetsuits are loaded up in a trailer and taken to the municipal beach. Kids come around and we invite them for free surf classes. But first we start with a Bible study and prayer. The kids see the love of Jesus on the faces of other young people like themselves. Top surfers have come

down, and it is a thrill for the young people to have great role models in their Christianity. They see that Christians have way more fun than people who don't know Jesus. The youth have been drawn by the joy we have in the Lord, and they have come to know they don't need to go to the local club on Saturday night to find true happiness.

### THE ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

I believe that every Christian needs to be involved in some kind of ministry. There is no such thing as a Christian who simply comes to a building once a week and feels that they have fulfilled some requirement. No, true Christianity is living it out. As leaders, we must try to identify what people like to do and plug them into ministries that will give them true purpose and meaning. It's easy to get a surfer involved in surf ministry. It's easy to get a Christian mechanic to attend the Baja 500 off-road outreach. It's easy to involve someone who loves children to teach at Sunday school. It is a joy to the person who loves to pray to become a part of our daily intercession group. The outgoing, smiling individuals are invited to become ushers at the church.

What we don't want to do is to have somebody who is shy and timid to feel frustrated because they are not out knocking on neighbors' doors sharing their faith. I believe Christianity should be fun and that we can find ways to deny ourselves, take up our cross and be effective witnesses in our community. The Bible says in Hebrews that, "Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him." Pastors need to have fun when they are teaching. Serving the Lord should be a blast. But a lot of people can't get past the sacrifice, or the "enduring the cross" part. They think Christianity is a bunch of rules with a whole lot of suffering.

Let me give you an illustration. Back when Nixon had the "Western White House" in San Clemente in the early 70s, the Marines restricted access to an incredible surf spot nearby called Trestles. One day, I was out there surfing and the waves were perfect. I was out there with five other guys, and I was getting really long rides in barreling waves, just like surfing in Hawaii. One wave in particular was like one long, glassy wall and I ascended and descended, as if I was on a high-speed

roller coaster. I kept going faster and faster...until suddenly the wave launched me in the air and I hit face first on the rocks below the water. It felt like somebody hit me with a baseball bat across my nose and eye. I started to black out, but I was able to hold onto my surfboard as I came to. I was really hurt and I knew my nose was broken. You can search a whole lifetime, and never find uncrowded, incredible waves like these. So despite the pain, I decided to paddle back out to the point to get just a few more rides. As I paddled out next to the guys sitting on their boards anticipating the next set, they started to freak out when they saw me, telling me that my face was covered with blood. Since I was already wet from surfing, I hadn't noticed that the wetness on my face was actually blood.

Here's the moral of the story. I was having so much fun surfing, I ignored the pain. Serving the Lord can cause serious pain, but we should be having so much fun that we simply don't care. We have the privilege of being an ambassador for the living God, and He will bless us for eternity in ways that we cannot even imagine. We should never lose the perspective about who we are working for and what awaits us in heaven. The pay isn't great, but the retirement plan is out of this world. We cannot afford to become discouraged.

One time in the 1980s, when I had been preaching in five Central American countries during one trip, I got tired. I remember walking alone down the long white tunnel to another plane. Suddenly, God opened my eyes spiritually. Suddenly I envisioned the walkway lined on each side by people cheering me on. "You're doing great. Keep it up. We're all rooting for you." I realized that the angels were cheering me on. We need to never become discouraged, no matter how difficult the trial is that we are going through. We can't lose our eternal perspective.

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen,

but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

## PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL HEALING

God’s kingdom is supernatural. When a person is born again, it is not mental belief or an intellectual acceptance of a faith. The Holy Spirit must kill the old man for new life to be born. Although dying to self is a lifelong process, the Spirit convicts or shows the individual their need to be rescued from destruction. The Ten Commandments reveal that we have all failed God’s standard for our lives. And so we all need to be born again. Living in a culture where many people profess to believe in Jesus, and are naturally kind and giving, it is imperative that the Holy Spirit does His work in the conversion process.

Back in 2003 we saw the last of the healing miracles that Jesus would do. Although most of the miraculous physical interventions took place in 1982 to 1983, occasionally God gave us a word of knowledge for healing. The Bible teaches that the power of the Lord was upon Jesus to heal. However, He didn’t always heal everybody, as evidently God’s sovereignty plays a role. In the book of Acts, we see the same thing. Sometimes the power of the Lord was there to heal physical bodies, in addition to their spirits. It was a sign confirming the preaching of the Word. Most of the time when I saw healings, I was not in my local setting, as “a prophet is without honor in his hometown” (Mark 6:4 paraphrased).

In 2003 I visited one of the largest evangelical churches in Germany, and during the Sunday morning message the Lord spoke to me that He wanted to physically heal a person at that very moment. I declared that Jesus was touching certain people among the 700 people in the audience, sharing a word of knowledge about a man who was always limping after two failed surgeries on his right ankle. The Spirit moved supernaturally and we prayed for people late into the evening after the final service.

Six months later, I saw Pastor Nick Long who was visiting from his church in Germany. He told me of two children who had been praying for their father to become a Christian, whom they repeatedly invited to church. At last the father agreed to go, on the condition that they would stop inviting him. When I started sharing words of knowledge that Sunday morning at his church, this man, as an atheist and skeptic, said in his mind, "This crazy Mexican guy is trying to manipulate people." This man's nickname was Gimpy because he walked with a limp after two failed surgeries on his right ankle. When I mentioned his condition, he later told his children that he felt a bolt of heat rush through his body from the top of his head down to his right ankle. He was instantly and totally healed. The most wonderful part of this story is that he became a follower of Jesus at that very moment. He knew what I was saying was true because God had touched and healed him in a very real and powerful way. He continues to serve the Lord there in Germany, as he has deposited his faith in God's Word, and not in the healing.

This would be the last confirmed healing miracle, although the greatest miracles still lay ahead.

"And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen" (Mark 16:20).



# PROMOTION COMES FROM THE LORD

“And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region” (Acts 13:49).

Even as the spring flowers blossomed into bright colors covering the hills surrounding us in Baja California, we too would see beautiful fruit spring up around Mexico as never before. The Lord was to confirm the word He spoke about raising up multiple pastors for many flocks that would come to Jesus.

As our church grew in Ensenada, we continued to work with the churches that we had started or helped in various ways around the country over the years. Today there are over ninety churches in our family of fellowships around the nation. We started sending out more and more people out to start new works, new sheepfolds.

Lisa and Jeannie Sue, with their home for battered mothers and children, had been driving three hours round trip all the way from the town of San Vicente each Sunday. We sent our worship leader down to their town to start Sunday services and the church grew quickly. They built an auditorium for 300 people right off the main highway and started to hold outreaches in the town plaza with teams coming from all over. More shepherds were then trained up to feed the flocks.

We disciplined and trained a young believer named Melquiades through our Bible college. He was originally from the state of Oaxaca and speaks the Mizteco language, as well as Spanish. Today not only is he the pastor of a bilingual church in Ensenada where Oaxacan immigrants can grow spiritually, but he has led missionary teams to go down to their villages of origin in southern Mexico to share the love of Jesus in their own native language.

I learned that we should never hold on to anything but rather give away that which has been given to us. I learned to take risks with people, even though sometimes we open up ourselves to unneeded pain. It is hard for pastors sometimes because when we try to help people, they can speak evil of us. Other times, we create our own pain as we misjudge people or do not deal with them lovingly. We are going to make mistakes and we need to learn how to forgive others and forgive ourselves. When we lose our temper or make a bad decision, this is a simple reminder that God uses imperfect vessels in order for Him to receive all the glory and credit.

### VISION FOR A BIBLE COLLEGE

For years we had been attempting to purchase a ranch in order to expand our ministry. One of the first people that came to the Lord in our fellowship was the son of the ex-mayor and senator of the country, Guilebardo Silva. This young man had been a heroin addict for twenty-six years. He tried all kinds of programs and had caused his family much grief. But Jesus came into Guile's life and transformed him. He became a member of our worship team after attending our School of Evangelism in Queretaro. His father, the senator, had offered us land to use in the Guadalupe Valley. However, by the time we were ready to go forward with the project, the door had closed.

Another young man who came to the Lord in our fellowship, Tomas Robertson, had also been hooked on drugs. He also went to study at our Bible school down south. He met a girl, Cynthia, who would later become my secretary and assistant, then he returned to Ensenada where I married them. His family owns the beach resort of the world-renowned surf spot, San Miguel, including 160 acres back in the canyon behind the beach.

We ended up purchasing twenty-five acres in this pristine beautiful canyon with a clear winter stream running through it. It also had a well for water, which is a very scarce commodity in this part of Mexico. Tomas had been an equestrian and had trained horses years previously on this property. It had been used for farming and at the

time we purchased it, there were horses, cattle, sheep and goats. Their family house had been turned into a corral for the sheep and goats. The beautiful rock floors had two inches of manure stuck to the stone.

Jesus had given us a vision how to develop the property. We brought in fifteen electrical poles and four transformers, as we had done for the property in Queretaro. When you have done something once, it is so much easier the second time around, even as the permits and the logistics can be complicated. We had a family living at the ranch, and we prayed for the finances to pay for it.

I like to share the vision that the Lord has given us during the Sunday morning messages. This is because I want everybody to be involved and informed as to what we are doing. I want them to know the spiritual principles they can use to serve the Lord in their community. It took a long time for somebody to catch the vision for our Bible college project.

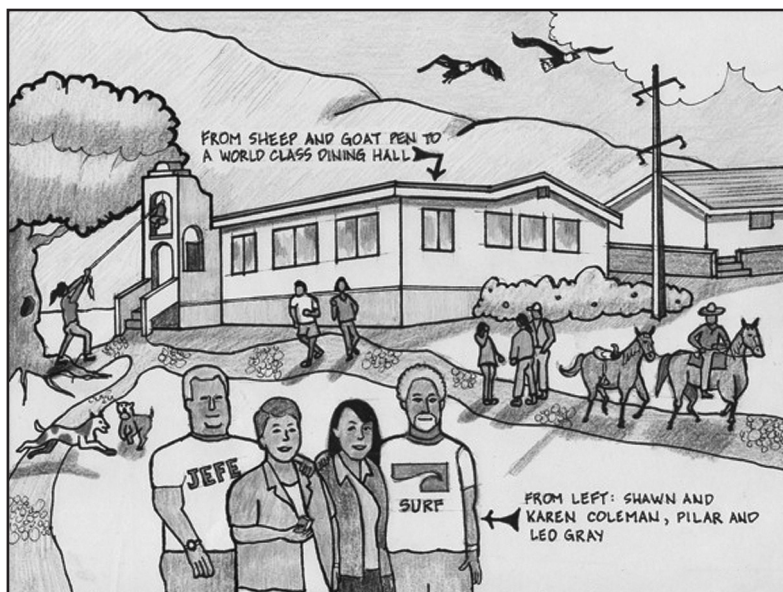
God had been merciful in providing two years interest-free financing for the property. However, when we did the title search, it revealed that there was an existing lien on the property due to a bank loan twenty-five years prior. We had a lawyer investigate and it turned out that the bank had gone out of business and after two years we were able to get the lien removed.

Then one day, a man with a passion to serve the Lord would respond to the call for our Bible college project. Jacob Beckman had been trying to open a chemical plant in Ensenada to manufacture materials to process DNA. After dealing with setbacks for permits, and eventually being unable to obtain the production quality he required for the company, Jacob came to me with his resume to launch what would become our Bible college for Mexico.

Once again God would anoint that person who would simply say, "Lord, use me." Jacob moved his family, with three small boys and his wife, to what had been the sheep and goat pen. We cleaned it up and framed in two bedrooms with a kitchen and a bath. This chemical

engineer then used his God-given talents to go on the Internet and download blueprints for the first buildings he would supervise to be built. He designed the project to be eco-friendly and began a nursery where we would grow native plants and vegetation, as well as composting and seed germination. This family completely abandoned themselves in their service to the King.

Jacob coordinated construction teams and found all kinds of used building materials, such as windows, doors, beds, cabinets and furniture. We have given the term “recycling” a whole new meaning. We used sand and gravel from the creek, as well as many beautiful rocks from the property, to do the stonework that adorns this spectacular and well manicured campus and conference center.



I believe that when God created the world, He created this spectacular valley just for us. It had been settled first by nomadic tribes. Adobe remains are still visible from 100 years ago when it was a stagecoach depot on the original dirt road from Tijuana to Ensenada. The Lord placed massive boulders in the exact spot to frame the entrance road

to our main campus. He graded the property in three tiers. The lower level would house the campus and staff housing, in addition to a soccer field, baseball field, and an RV park. We saw an incredible opportunity for active seniors who wanted to be productive and volunteer their time and talents to our building project, and at the same time enjoy the incredible deep-sea fishing, surfing, off-road racing and hiking. Retirement is not a time to stop serving the Lord.

The second tier, which is located on a gorgeous eight-acre bluff, has beautiful views of the pristine valley and a cool sea breeze that comes down the canyon from the beach. This is where we will build our main campus and dormitories with a capacity of 800 students.

So Jacob designed an elaborate water system to supply the property with the crystal clean well water. He also set up a system to utilize the gray water, to irrigate the gorgeous fruit trees and bougainvilleas, which frame the idyllic setting for our outdoor eating area. When his family moved out of the main building, we remodeled it and converted it into a dining hall for eighty people, complete with an industrial kitchen, walk-in refrigerated room and a large pantry for food storage.

We built a chapel that seats 120, along with four large two-story homes that serve as dormitories for sixty-three students who currently stay there. They have come from as far away as Africa, all over the United States and Canada, as well as from all over Mexico and Latin America.

### PROMOTION FROM THE LORD

God's Word says that promotion doesn't come from the east or west but from the Lord. I never felt called to invest my time in traveling around to promote the ministry here in Mexico. However, the Lord has done many miracles and got the word out so people are blessed by what God is doing here.

Our desire is to provide a first-class educational experience for young people, to have an encounter with the living God and with other Spirit-filled believers. They receive training from experienced senior pastors and missionaries with decades of experience.

I've never personally set up resource tables with literature about our Bible college at the various Christian conferences. Rather, I wanted to spend time attending them and encouraging the people in attendance. I've always made it my goal to lift up the spirits of another worker in the Lord's harvest field. I know how people can get beat up in the ministry and how a word "fitly spoken" can inspire a person to continue on, rather than throw in the towel.

After a friend of mine visited us in Ensenada, he could see the need for more people to get involved. He designed a color brochure covering all the different things we were doing, and then called to see if this literature could be placed on a table at the conference where all the pastors attend. The secretary said that there would be no tables that year, but if we had a brochure it could be placed inside the registration packet which would go directly to all these leaders. As everybody else used the tables, only two or three brochures went out to the pastors that year, and ours was one of them. Jesus supernaturally provided all the resources to do His work.

I also had the honor of being asked to teach a general session to 1,000 pastors from around the world. It was there that many people heard our story for the first time and later sent mission teams to help us.

Herbert and Gitta, a German couple who produced many documentaries on the Discovery Channel, "just happened" to visit Ensenada as they were sailing their yacht en route to the Mexican Riviera. They were walking in the tourist area of our city, and they were invited to our church. Herbert saw what we were doing in all the different ministries and was amazed at how many people's lives were being touched.

He personally produced a short documentary film on the work we were doing and posted it on YouTube. He also contacted his Hollywood friends and they donated all the equipment needed to open our own TV studio. He was just sailing through, but ended up staying four months. God has so many supernatural ways to provide for the advancement of His work. He wasn't physically healing a blind

eye, but rather opening many eyes around the world so people could pray for us. It is every bit as much a miracle. Indeed, the Lord was touching the entire country of Mexico.

### STAFF FOR THE BIBLE COLLEGE

Shawn Coleman and his wife, Karen, had been missionaries in an impoverished part of Tijuana. However, he had dreamed of being a professor to teach the next generation of Mexican pastors and leaders to be equipped for the ministry. Even as others have made *our* dreams come true, for many people, we have made *their* dreams a reality. This couple lived in a trailer at our campus in the beginning, as Shawn took on the challenge of being the first academic director for the college, with Karen spearheading the accounting department.

A missionary couple from Florida, Leo and Pilar Gray, moved down to Ensenada and became our operations directors. They had been bringing mission teams down to help for a decade before they decided to become missionaries themselves. What a joy to see their servant's heart in making sure the students have what they need, in order to pursue *their* dream of serving the Lord.

Two members of our first graduating class, Tomas and Luisa, were married and have taken leadership roles at the Bible college and at our orphanage. It is thrilling to see these young people blazing with the love of Jesus and shining much light into the next generation. Mexico's future is in great hands.

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13).





## CHAPTER 17

# MY DREAM COME TRUE

“For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” (2 Timothy 1:12).

When my health came crashing down in the summer of 1982, I learned the glorious rest of faith. Instead of trying to please God by my good works and effort, I learned that without faith it is impossible to please God. The Lord looks at our best works and sees they are nothing but filthy rags. We are not able to produce anything that is good, only the Holy Spirit inside us can produce fruit. Therefore anything good in our lives is for God’s glory, because He worked in spite of us, not because of us.

After spending much of the year in bed, in 1983 I was asked to preach with the Darrell Mansfield Band in the city of Tel Aviv, Israel. Although the Israeli authorities pulled the plug in the middle the concert, we still shared Jesus one-on-one in the plaza. Then they escorted us out of the area. It was at this time that I got back in shape physically, running every day, and my strength came back to a large extent. The Lord spoke to me there in Israel in a life-changing way through the life of Elijah.

### JONATHAN, MY ELISHA

Elijah was passionate serving the Lord and even called down fire from heaven in an evangelistic outreach on Mount Carmel. He had wiped out much evil and corruption. What was the result? Queen Jezebel threatened his life, telling him he would be dead the next day. Depressed and discouraged, Elijah ran off into the desert wastelands. There he prayed and questioned the Lord, feeling that he was the only prophet left in Israel. There was an earthquake but God was silent.

A fire broke out but no word from the Lord. A windstorm buffeted Elijah, but still there was a deafening quiet.

Then in a still small voice, Jehovah spoke, saying, “There are still 7,000 who have not bowed their knee to Baal. You are not the only one serving Me. Now I want you to go and anoint the king in Damascus to reign over Syria and establish your disciple, Elisha, as the prophet of Israel in your place.” It looked like God took away Elijah’s ministry because he had become discouraged and ran.

But upon further study of the text, we see that in 2 Kings, chapter 1, Elijah is back in the ministry once again. He has his mantle of authority back and commands the Jordan River to supernaturally divide. He is working miracles and prophesying once again, this time to the king of Samaria. As he is taken away from the earth in a whirlwind, a double portion of God’s Spirit falls upon his disciple, Elisha, who had established a school of prophets to multiply the ministry of Elijah to the next generation. Even though Elijah never saw a revival, there would be great spiritual awakening in the days of Elisha.

Through this story I sensed that the Lord wanted me to train up disciples. I no longer had the physical strength to do all that I had once done, but now there was an anointing to raise up others to reach Mexico. With rigorous daily exercise and a strict diet, I would have another thirty years of ministry. But over the years, my strength would slowly slip away due to the fact that I had a rare brain disease which had not even been discovered when I first started having the migraine headaches. So if I tried to do too much, I would be rewarded with a splitting headache and I would not be able to minister at all until the pain had subsided.

By the summer of 2007, the migraine headaches became a daily occurrence and lasted for up to three months at a time. I was unable to preach during those times, and this is when I dedicated my strength to intercede for the Bible college project and the School of Ministry at our church. This is when God began to pour out His Holy Spirit upon my son, Jonathan, who would become my Elisha.

This young man, born to us in Mexico City, attended Bible school, and in 2008 he moved to England as a missionary. In the summer of 2009, Jonathan returned back to Ensenada, as my headaches became more incapacitating. He began teaching more and more in my place, and during the summer of 2010, he met his sweetheart, Evelyn, and they married the next year. Jonathan then took over the ministry at the church, as I was unable to teach at all during the summer of that year. This twenty-one-year-old man had wisdom way beyond his years and he had become an ardent student of the Scriptures.

Meanwhile, I needed to take a sabbatical break. There was also a pressing need in the church back in Queretaro, so I moved 2,000 miles down south into my mother-in-law's house. My mission was to teach and encourage the fellowship there for four months, as I rested from the multiple responsibilities I had in Ensenada.

In a sense, I had returned to my roots. I was in the city that I loved and where I had witnessed Jesus start an incredible work of the Spirit. I was able to rest during the day, as I was living by myself, and then teach Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights. It was a beautiful time of quiet where I was able to hear from the Lord and pray accordingly. Once again, I was eating in the open market and praying for the people around me, as I had done when I first arrived in Mexico. Jesus brought me full circle. There is much to be said about the benefits for those in the ministry to take time off and simply get alone with God. I believe when we are constantly busy, we get tired, and it becomes much harder to hear God's still, small voice.

### A NEW CHURCH IN QUERETARO

It turned out that there in the city of Queretaro, we decided to launch a new church plant, with the pastor who had been there for the past few years. We continued to pay his salary, as well as his staff, for the next six months. Two new churches grew from this step of faith.

Attendance dropped at our church by half as we launched out in this new church venture. But whatever we sow, that also we shall reap.

Many pastors try to hold on to the sheep, as if the sheep belong to them. The little lambs belong to the Lord. As we fed these little ones, they grew and multiplied. By the fourth month, the church was bigger than it had ever been previously and was busting at the seams.

After my four-month commitment was over, I then asked my son, Jonathan, to move to Queretaro to take over the church as I went back to my role as the pastor in Ensenada. However, upon my return, I found myself no longer physically able to sustain the rigorous work demands of being a senior pastor. I asked my son to find a pastor for the church down south, and for him to come back and become the lead pastor in Ensenada. I would be his assistant and teach as my health allowed. Once again, God would use my weakness to show forth His strength and accomplish His purpose.

Jonathan, I realized, had a gift to teach that was simply amazing. As I had evolved my style to interface with unbelieving multitudes, I had lost some of my effectiveness in expounding the Scriptures for the sheep. It is such a joy to simply be the person that God has created us to be. We never need to try to be like someone else, but rather let Jesus transform us into His image, with our very unique personality left intact.

Not only was my son able to connect to his generation, but by becoming the lead pastor at the age of twenty-two, he has been able to hone a style which is contemporary, as well as “spot on” theologically, and relevant to young people. That was the same age that I began teaching Bible studies. As I look back, I can see, once again, God’s genius in a fluid transition, as I have been able to help him learn from my many mistakes in trying to be the best pastor possible.

### GIVING OUR ALL IN JOY

I do think that every day, every moment, every message should be the absolute best that we can give. It doesn’t matter if we are sharing with twenty people or 20,000 people, there should be the same preparation, intensity and passion. We only go around once and we need to give 100 percent in whatever we are doing. Sometimes we think that some of the things we do are more important than other things. The

Bible says, “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23-24). Everything I do should be building me up, and those around me, physically, emotionally or spiritually. One thing I have learned is that many times when I’m standing before the people, I need to be a mouthpiece that the Lord can speak through. I have to ignore pain, depression or distraction, and laser focus my energy into transmitting the truth.

One day after the message, a friend came up to me and said, “If you are as happy as you say you are, you need to let your face show it.” Now, the Devil will say that you are being a hypocrite when you preach about the joy of the Lord, while you are feeling totally miserable. I’ve learned to ignore the way I feel so that I can let Jesus shine through me. And it is not only when you are standing in front of the people.

I remember years ago when I was sharing Jesus in a subway car in Mexico City. An apparently destitute older man pushed his way forward and asked me about the light that he saw shining around me in the back of the car. I told him that it was a sign specifically for him that Jesus loved him and had chosen that day for him to come to the cross and become born again. I don’t believe anybody else saw that light, but the Lord wants to rescue individual people wherever we go.

Another time years later, two missionaries just showed up at our house reporting for duty. They told me later that they were quite surprised by what transpired, although I don’t even remember the incident. They said that as they sat expectantly on the couch, waiting for me to talk with them, I spent a whole hour sitting on the stairs with my daughter, Debbie, encouraging her as she was having a difficult day with her homeschooling. At first impression, my priorities to them seemed strange.

### DEBBIE, SERVANT OF THE LORD

Our daughter Debbie has always been a servant of the Lord. When she was just six years old, people would visit our house and she would instantly stop what she was doing and run to the kitchen to bring

out cookies and a cold drink. One time, she just wanted to talk to dad alone. She had seen how I sat down to talk with people from the church. The doorbell rang and as I opened the door, it was little Debbie looking up at me with her big brown eyes and saying, “Can I sit down and talk with Pastor Juan?” That showed me that I wasn’t as available to my children as I should have been.

At ten years old, she was our first worship leader when we started in Ensenada. For the first two years, others would join her until we had assembled our worship team. When God called Moses to be His deliverer, he said, “How can I do this if I am not able?” All he had was a staff, or a stick, in his hand. I’ve learned to work with that which I have, even though it is just a stick. I don’t wait until I have that which I need to do the job, I simply use what I have, and as I go forward, the Lord provides everything I need, at the exact moment I need it. I don’t look around and see what I don’t have, but rather, what I do have. Then God multiplies the little I have and does the supernatural.

After attending Bible school in San Diego, Debbie flew off to Germany to study at the Bible college with David Guzik. He took her under his wing and she was trained by one of the finest Bible teachers that I know. She then came back and was a missionary in southern Mexico, but had to come home from a lack of financial support. She then decided to become a doctor so that she would have the finances and skills to help people around the world. She endured epilepsy as a child and many physical challenges as she grew older. All these things worked together for the good and have given her the compassion to help people and to share eternal truth with them. As she finishes medical school, the Lord has permitted her to be the student representative for the Ensenada campus on the state university advisory board. She is friends with the rector and the dean of the school. She has organized the university students to do medical clinics at the Christian orphanages.

Debbie recently organized a free medical clinic at our Ensenada church and over 1,400 people were seen by doctors and given free medicine. She also oversaw the dental clinic where many people were helped. This was the biggest free medical clinic ever in our city. She was asked to organize three more clinics in the poorest of areas, and people heard

the gospel in different Indian dialects. When they came for treatment of their physical health, they received spiritual health too.

## LEARNING COMPASSION

As part of the training for our Bible college, we have seen the importance of not only having students academically prepared, but also teaching them to have a compassionate heart to love people into the kingdom of God. People around the world are not waiting anxiously to hear about our culture or our religion. They will only listen if we have earned their respect, in that they see God's love in us. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). Loving God is not learned in a classroom. It must be experienced as we exercise our faith in a contrary and angry world.

For this reason, we have built a 10,000 square foot state-of-the-art facility for special needs children who have been abandoned by their parents. We integrated this home into our Bible college campus. These children will not only have somebody to take care of them, but our students can learn the practicalities of God's love and compassion. Mexico does not have the money for the government to take care of special needs individuals. There are no state-owned facilities, but they help us by channeling to us those who most need help. We look to God alone for the provisions for these children.

When we finished building the Casa Horizonte, as we call our abandoned children's home, we were asked to receive a mentally and physically challenged eleven-year-old girl, Isabel. She had been born to alcoholic parents who abandoned her by a trash heap after birth. We had no staff or finances, so my wife Tania and I decided to move into the home to be the first parents. It was quite an adventure, taking care of a little girl who could not talk and struggled to walk. She would reach out to gently touch our cheeks, as if to say, "Thank you for bringing me into your family." And then a few times instead of reaching out to give us a gentle touch, she would smack us in the face really hard, and then would look at us through her crossed eyes as if to say, "Oops."

For most of those three months, my wife was alone there during the nights and mornings until we could coordinate a staff of volunteers. During that time, I had been involved in another city, working on a church plant venture. My wife grew to love this little girl like her own daughter.

With Tania as the director, we began to receive more children. Little five-year-old Carlitos, and his six-year-old brother, Juanito, had been subjected to cruelty and then abandoned. They are not able to talk, and neither one of them is able to walk. They have grown up sliding themselves along the floor to get around. They have been thrilled to be at our home, and are learning to communicate through sign language.

Little five-year-old Jose Manuel was so severely beaten that he suffered massive brain damage. We brought him into our home and he has filled it with love. Even though he is bedridden, his smile lights the place up.

Jessica was born blind with her eyes shriveled like pancakes and had been tortured, then the state asked us to take her in. She is a five-year-old in a two-year-old body, and had been subjected to terrible cruelty and was sent out to beg on the streets. On her first Sunday, when we dedicated her to the Lord in front of the fellowship, she was led down off the stage. Sensing there was a large crowd by the applause during the dedication, she started stretching out her hand and began saying, “Un peso...un peso.” Instead of being raised as a beggar, she is going to be raised as a child of the King of kings. The people are delighted in realizing the amazing blessing of having little Jessica grow up as part of our new family. She is now attending school and open to a whole new world.

### THE MINISTRY TODAY

My incredible wife, Tania, continues to be the full-time director of this home, as she not only nurtures these precious children, but is an example to the students who volunteer their time in learning how to be a servant. She is also a much sought-out conference speaker. She has a gift to encourage women and lead them to Jesus.



I have the incredible satisfaction of seeing our Bible college with sixty-three students plus staff and interns, giving themselves to be the next generation of missionaries, to go around the world and continue that which we have started.

We have been training up a whole new generation of young pastors. Four of these young men lead churches that have grown to over 500-700 people on Sunday mornings, and these guys aren't even thirty years old yet.

The church in Mexico City was started by Hector Hermosillo, who was one of the musicians for the hit singer, Luis Miguel, who became a part of our Festival team, along with singer Maria Del Sol. A young rap star, Fermin IV Caballero, had several hit songs with his band, Control Machete. He was in his final year of medical school when his band soared on the billboard charts and he became a famous pop sensation. Hector turned the growing church over to Fermin, who was just thirty years old at the time. The church today has over 3,000 people on Sunday mornings, renting a beautiful facility right off the freeway in the middle of Mexico City. Hector also planted a church in Cuernavaca in our old home, which continued to grow and has moved into a tent on a lot across the street from the house.

In 2009, the swine flu pandemic hit central Mexico, killing hundreds of people and completely shutting down Mexico City. Everybody in the city was terrified and locked themselves into their homes. I realized that this could be a great opportunity to share God's Word over the television to twenty million people sequestered inside.

I wasn't worried about getting sick, so I flew into the city that night with \$3,000 cash hoping to broadcast a special Christian TV show. Since all the restaurants had closed because of the pandemic, I munched on beef jerky for dinner. It's all I had to eat. But in the morning I called our pastor, Fermin, and he and his wife Teresa, invited me to their house for breakfast. Being a well-known celebrity, I asked for his help to see if he could negotiate with the TV executives. Unfortunately, Fermin could only settle the price for \$10,000. I took this as God's

signal for me to go home since we couldn't afford their price to televise a Christian program. At least I could get a good meal to eat!

However, my trip was not in vain. When Fermin met with the TV executives, they invited him to go on Mexico City TV for free! Not only was he able to share the gospel message, but he was invited back to put on a concert in one of the biggest and most beautiful concert venues in the entire country, the National Auditorium—all for free! Thousands of people came to Christ around the city as God used a national crisis to spread His Word.

My dear friend, Jaime Foote, who was also there when God poured out His Spirit twenty years earlier in Mexico City, was chosen by Hector Hermosillo to be the lead pastor in Cuernavaca. Hector and his family have since gone on to plant churches in Chicago and in California.

Jaime and Christa Foote are being used in a wonderful way down in central Mexico. I so admire this couple as these missionaries learned the culture and language even better than I had. I believe it is so very important to honor the people and their culture by speaking their language as perfectly as possible, and by learning the customs and honoring their traditions. Jaime and his family have been an inspiration to me through their dedication and commitment to excellence. He also has started a local TV show and is working hard training up the next generation of future Mexican leaders and pastors.

It has been truly wonderful to be part of a family of missionaries, local pastors and churches. I've learned so much from them, and have grown to love this beautiful family so deeply. God has fulfilled all of the promises that He made to me.

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church” (3 John 1:4-6).

## CHAPTER 18

# SEE YOU AT THE GATE

“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:12-13).

On our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary getaway vacation in 2012, Tania and I had a wonderful time together, as we so enjoy each other. Wouldn't you know it, the Spirit rocked the boat on which we traveled. We saw a mini revival break out. We shared the Lord with many of the passengers and servers and some of the ship staff, when we printed up flyers and invited all the crew to an outreach. Several lives were touched when the Lord opened the door for me to share the gospel down in the “belly” of the ship. Many made a decision to follow Christ and we ended up baptizing Joseph from Nicaragua and Bart from the Philippines right there in the spa pool of the boat so they could publicly declare their faith in Jesus.

Once again, on this trip we would take together, the Lord blessed us with the most fun we could possibly have. There is no greater joy than to see a person, who was lost in darkness, come into the light for the first time. Nothing is more exciting than to see a baby born spiritually, and fall madly in love with their Creator.

We are not on a quest for happiness, but joy is our constant companion on this path that we walk. This joy is only a byproduct of “hanging out” each day alongside of Jesus, because in His presence we find the fullness of joy. As we traverse obstacles, adversity, pain and struggles, we know that Jesus endured the cross because of the joy that was set before Him. We must keep the perspective that we are

simply passing through this planet during our time here as a pilgrim. Our true citizenship is in heaven where we have stored away all of our treasures, hopes and dreams. One day all of us will experience a joy so powerful that it will leave us simply speechless. Oh, that we could taste today and see that the Lord is good and come to realize that this kingdom joy can be experienced through our sweet communion with our Maker.

As I write today, at age 56, this rare brain disease, autonomic nervous system failure, has confined me to spending most of my time in bed. As this condition has developed, I have learned another chapter in the amazing grace of God. Although my body has lost its strength and my energy is waning, the tantalizing prospects of soon feeling the strong arms of Jesus squeezing me tight cause me to be giddy as a child. Navigating an illness like this has not been easy, but I have this one last adventure in store. Conditions are perfect to ride this final wave to glory.

Truth be told, I was never sensitive enough to follow the Lord's voice and to obey His leading. He used my failing health to move me from city to city and eventually train up the next generation of Christian leaders, while they were still young. Jesus granted me the desire of my heart, as I simply begged Him to use my life in some small way. I feel I'm the luckiest man on the face of the earth.

This isn't the final chapter of the story. The greatest chapter is still to be written as we embark on the thrill of exploring heaven with Jesus and with our spiritual family for all of eternity.

I will be waiting for you...and meet you there at the gate along with my friends from Mexico.

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).