

## **Chapter 5 A Time of Change and Intercession**

### **John Heads Home**

The next year went by quickly. We paid the import taxes to retrieve the projector from customs and purchased many Christian movies and were showing them mostly in the soup kitchen, but also to the men at the farm. We enjoyed the peace and quiet of our new environment. We often loaded up the men and headed to the small fellowship where we used to live for an evening service. John led the men in a rigorous daily routine of spiritual and physical effort to build and prepare them to return to a normal life. I continued to reach out to the men, women, and adolescents in the streets of our Zone 4 soup kitchen.

The following summer, I was invited to be the best man in my brother's wedding and flew back to the States to participate in the joyous occasion. While I was there, I worked enough to purchase a used van. I enjoyed my family, the food, and some rest, before returning, to Guatemala. My trip was rather uneventful for the first time. I had learned which route to take to face the least resistance, and I knew how to deal quickly with corrupt police officers. On this particular trip, I passed customs rather easily because I had so little cargo. I arrived at the farm late in the evening after everyone had gone to sleep.

The next day, John seemed off. His normal bubbly and enthusiastic personality was barely noticeable. He had been alone for almost a month, running both the discipleship farm and the soup kitchen. I don't remember much of our conversation other than he was leaving our work and going home. Honestly, I also don't remember caring all that much. When I sent this testimony to John to verify the details of the events, he remembers how sad I was. But my love was too immature at the time, and I was too selfish to think much about him. It was my vision, anyway, and the work of the "Lord" had to go on!

### **The Move to the Warehouse**

Before John returned home, we closed the intern program at the farm and gave most of the equipment to other ministries. After he left, I moved to a room next to the soup kitchen which was located on the ground floor of a huge three-story warehouse. Most of the floor was used as an underground parking lot. The building administrator converted one of the small storage units in the garage into living quarters for me. It was the most efficient use of a six by ten foot space ever occupied by a gringo, but quite normal for third-world folks.

If you entered and looked to your left, you would see my homemade bunk bed. On the right you would see my crudely made desk, and then concrete building blocks supporting boards which held my clothes and Bible study materials. I had to turn sideways to make it between the furniture and get to the toilet or showerhead in the back three feet of the room. Being close to a toilet with toilet paper was a huge plus because of the number of times I had to do the one-two step diarrhea dance!

A small hallway outside my door led to the infamous alley called “El Olló” which means the hole. It was known for prostitution, violence, robberies, and murder. I had become close to several of the teenage boys that lived there, and they became my main focus as I tried to reach them with the good news. They were all glue-sniffers who had run away or been sent away from dysfunctional living situations.

I loved my new home and the downsizing of responsibility. The most wonderful part was that I was steps away from the soup kitchen. No more fighting the insane traffic and constant risks that came with competing in the Indianapolis 500 every time I took to the streets.

I missed John greatly, at first. His love for Jesus and gift of encouragement never left you wanting. I learned later that God needed to get me alone. He was preparing my heart for a revelation that would dramatically change my life. The sovereignty of God is not limited to a cookbook approach to growing us into mature Christians. He knits us together in our mother’s womb. He draws us toward salvation. And He is the One responsible for the best plan to make us into the person we were meant to be to serve in His kingdom. We are simply to trust and obey.

### **Pride Fueled by Teams**

We often had teams from the States visit and assist us. Many saw me as a radical follower of Christ. My pride drank deeply from those observations. I was approaching the three-year mark as a Christian. I had learned how to study the Bible, inductively and had several trophies in my heart for books of both the Old and New Testaments that I had dissected. But I judged almost everyone that was not following Christ the way I was. Knowledge puffs up but love builds up. I was ready to be humbled and my loving Father knew just how to reach me.

## **Trials and Violence of the Alley**

The area was brutal on everyone that lived there and I was no exception. Often, in the wee hours of the morning a voice would call to me from the alley asking me to take him or her to the hospital. A failed robbery usually brought physical consequences. One 18-year-old young man sustained severe cuts to his hands and arms when he stopped several angry swings of a machete by a store owner who caught him stealing. He was pieced together at a public hospital, but to my knowledge, lost the use of much of his hands and arms.

Another time, as I sat eating my soup for dinner, I looked up just in time to see a store owner striking one of the teens (I had been hoping to reach) in the back of his head with an aluminum baseball bat. My memory is permanently scarred with the sounds and pictures. The store owner hit him a second time before I was able to intervene and stop the insanity. The boy staggered off, bleeding from his nose.

Occasionally the police would get tired of all the crime in the alley, and pick up any male who looked like a glue-sniffer. The street people said the police took them away somewhere and shot them. I never saw any evidence of this, but the people would never reappear. I knew they were not in either of the two prison systems, because I visited both. One young man who had been coming to our worship services for well over a year was a shoe-shine boy who lived with one of the prostitutes, who also regularly came. I believe the child she nursed during our service was a product of their relationship. She witnessed the police picking the young man up one day, and he never returned.

After dark one evening, as I headed to my “comedor” café to eat, one of the teenagers I ministered to ran towards me. Within seconds, he was followed by a man with his gun drawn and pointed our way. He was irate, accusing the boy of robbing him. He said he was going to shoot him. I stuck my hand up begging for mercy as he ran by. Thankfully, he accepted my petition.

Over the next few months, we experienced a relentless barrage of Satan’s work. Jesus said Satan’s main occupation is to rob, kill and destroy. We had already seen our share of violence, and maybe even killing. Theft was rampant as well. Someone stole my passport and my only treasured earthly possession – an expensive Swiss army knife. It meant a lot to me because my family gave it to me before I entered the Peace Corps. My digestive system was constantly taking a hit, usually accompanied by lower energy levels.

## **Our Precious Staff of Three**

Seeing the three precious Guatemalans who served in the soup kitchen was the highlight of my day. The two women had left prostitution, drugs, and alcohol. You could clearly see how much they were forgiven by the way they loved people. The other was a Christian brother who married one of the women and was brought into the kingdom mainly by his wife's testimony and love for Jesus. He was well on his way to a lifelong commitment to a religious order, but walked away after seeing men pay substantial amounts of money to have their sins of murder forgiven. He turned to alcohol for a season, but Jesus eventually brought him into the fold. They had all been rescued from darkness, and had the fruit to back it up.

## **Ministering to the Demonically Oppressed**

Because of my experience on the streets, the English-speaking church I attended called and asked me to minister to a young woman named Juana (not her real Name). They believed she was possessed by demons. One of the Christian brothers from the church took me to see her. She was about twenty years old, the daughter of a wealthy couple, and had been bed-ridden for days. We prayed for her deliverance, but not seeing any results, I told her loved ones I was committed to praying and fasting on her behalf.

## **Intercession Ignited**

Soon after leaving Juana, God ignited intercession within me. I often could not sleep past one or two o'clock in the morning. I would get up, leave my 6 by 10 living quarters, and walk a few feet to the soup kitchen across the narrow hallway. I have never been much for praying on my knees. I had a path that I would make hundreds of trips around before those days ended. It was a good thing the floors were concrete.

The Lord led me to spend hours in Psalm 5, 6, 8, 9 16, and 18 placing the young woman's name everywhere a pronoun appeared. The Psalmist, David, was looking for strength to defeat his enemies and to secure deliverance, mostly from Saul. I used his words to pray for Juana's deliverance.

Psalm 18 was especially exciting to me, and even to this day, whenever I hear a thunderstorm, I think of God riding on the wings of the wind as He proclaims the destruction of our enemies with lightning and thunder from His mighty hand. Within a

week or so though the Lord shifted the focus from Juana to me and I began placing my own name where every noun or pronoun appeared.