

TOW SACKS

By Buddy Johnson

“When God starts
giving, He will even
lend you the Tow Sacks.”

BAPTIST MISSIONARY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

3 6182 0123536 7



ISBN 2370000677792



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MISSIONS

To BMA TS:
Thanks for pouring
into lives of men like
me!
Buddy
5/7/19

TOW SACKS

*Just a rambling of thoughts as I remember...
and some that I was told.*

By Buddy Johnson

Forward by John David Smith

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MAY 21 2019

BMA Seminary
Jacksonville, Texas

Published by the Baptist Missionary Association of America
Department of Missions
Conway, Arkansas
www.bmamissions.org

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Department of Missions

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"I thankfully dedicate this book to the two people who lived the great majority of our church planting with me, Catarino and Martha. I also include those whose love and devotion have encouraged me; Taffy who rescued our family, and Grady, Scott, Eric, Jon, Ben, and Sara for their dedication to our Lord. Also to our grandchildren who will learn to see the Tow Sacks God provides as He gives."

- Buddy Johnson

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FORWARD

by Dr. John David Smith

I first met Buddy Johnson in 1988 when I led a group on a visit to the ministry he spearheaded in Huejutla, Mexico. As a 19-year-old young man, who thought he knew a lot, it did not take long for me to learn multiple lessons from observing Buddy and his ministry. One day during our visit, he invited me to accompany him to the bank. I thought, "Okay, what a good opportunity to get to know him better and to see some of the local scenery." It did not take me very long to become frustrated with the trip to the bank. My frustrations mounted because, like most Americans, I was focused on the task at hand without recognizing the people around me. Not Buddy! He had to stop and greet seemingly every person on the way...it took "forever" to get to the bank.

Once we were finally inside the bank, we encountered the mayor of Huejutla, and Buddy proceeded to visit with him for almost half an hour. Since I could not understand Spanish, I was forced to remain within my own thoughts as I observed the activity of the bank and waited for the "inconvenient" conversation with the mayor to end. My thoughts in those moments went something like this: "This man must be one of the worst missionaries in the history of the world. He is taking half a day to simply go to the bank. I imagine that if our churches who support his ministry knew what he was up to here in Mexico, they would be disappointed and perhaps not even want to support him any longer."

Now, in having served as a missionary to West Africa and in missions administration for a combined 25 years, my thoughts about what I saw in the bank that day have changed radically. I have said on multiple occasions that Buddy Johnson is one of the greatest missionaries I have ever met. He continues to be a great friend and brother from whom I have learned lesson after lesson.

In his memoir, *Tow Sacks*, you are about to embark on a riveting journey through cross-cultural ministry in the interior of Mexico and beyond. The lessons of being highly relational (as I saw firsthand on the trip to the bank), and having great faith, a clear vision, hard work, and resilience are all going to be evident as he recounts his story. As in every great story, *Tow Sacks* has a victorious thread that runs all the way through from beginning to end...it is all about a gracious God who sustains and blesses those who go in faith and obedience.

Tow Sacks also possesses another key ingredient of a great story: persistence in the face of difficulty. You will be blessed and inspired as you read about simple beginnings, great faith, and the realization of a God-given vision in the midst of cultural and language challenges, relationship building issues, life threats, sickness, robberies, floods, close calls in airplanes, tragic loss, and the necessary wrestling with God over our own unworthiness.

As great as Bro. Buddy's fruitfulness has been in ministry, it can be argued that his greatest fruit is seen in the lives of his six children. You will see the importance of his family throughout his story. What a joy to know that all of your children are also bearing fruit in the kingdom. It has been my joy to work alongside Buddy, Taffy, and three of his children in global missions. If you knew nothing else about him other than the testimony of his wife and children, that would be enough.

The image of Buddy Johnson that will forever be etched in my mind is that of him standing in front of me with a toothpick perched in his lips, his head slightly tilted to one side as he smiles, removes the toothpick for a moment, and does these two things: 1) He will remind you of how simple he is. 2) He will give you some wisdom that you can live by. I echo Buddy's prayer at the end of the book that his writings

will inspire you to be part of the solution for the lack of laborers in the harvest. May you live a life marked by Tow Sack after Tow Sack!

THE EARLY DAYS

I was born in Nacogdoches, Texas to Grady and Janie Johnson on Christmas day in 1942. Having been born during World War II, when our entire country was struggling financially, physically, and emotionally, I was a product of hardworking, faithful American Christians. We lived in a little farm house about two miles west of downtown on the Douglas Highway. My father had finished his stint in the army when World War II began, so he joined the Merchant Marines and served as a cook and baker on the Duncan L. Clinch Liberty Ship during the war.

While Dad was away in the service to our country, our Mom; Jean and Jane, my sisters; Aunt Merle; and I lived in a little four room house which was about fifty yards from Dad's parents' house. They owned the Shady Oaks Grocery Store and helped look after us while our father was away. Aunt Lamerle, "Merle" as we called her, was sixteen years old and helped Mom care for the three of us.

While my father was returning from La Havre, France, in the English Channel, during his time of service, the ship hit a floating German mine and sank. My father and all the other sailors on the ship survived, but they lost all of their belongings, including their identity documents. The day before the ship sank, Dad saw the front page of the Dallas Morning News. The picture on the front page was of the brick doorsteps to our little house. Sitting on the steps were my grandmother, Ma Swain; dad's dog, Aster; and my sister's broken doll. Nothing else was in the picture. The house was completely gone.

When Dad saw the picture in the newspaper, he exclaimed, "That's my dog!" He learned that day that a tornado had completely demolished his little house. Unable to contact anyone, my dad knew nothing about the condition of his family. Some of the sailors made it to France after the ship sank, and others, along with my Dad, made it to England.

He flew to New York with hopes of getting to his family as soon as possible. Dad was delayed for almost two days due to his lack of documents, but somehow he met an oil executive who was about to leave in a company plane headed for Texas. Dad traveled with him to Beaumont, Texas, then "hitchhiked" to Nacogdoches, hoping to find his family alive. From the courthouse in Nacogdoches, he walked two miles to the place where our house once stood.

The "storm," as it was called for the rest of my mother's life, had hit about 8 o'clock on that dreadful night. Our little house was lifted and thrown into the sky, crashing to the ground in the field behind. Mother had gotten the three of us kids into bed with her. The iron bedstead probably saved Jean and Jane's lives. Mother and I were thrown from the bed and were bashed pretty badly. Mother had many broken bones and fractures. Her jaw, back, ribs, and limbs were all fractured and hurt. I had a severe head injury and was unconscious with a bad concussion, a severe laceration on one of my arms, and was found face down in a puddle of muddy water; my granddad supposed me to be dead. They transported Mom, Aunt Merle, and myself to the hospital.

Oh, poor Aunt Merle! She had been thrown into the kitchen area, and I suppose everything in the kitchen that was glass had broken. Also, the entire roof of the house was on top of her. My grandfather, Tommy, and other neighbors were searching for all of us and could not find her. Someone saw part of one of her legs under the roof section of the house. All of them joined forces and lifted the roof from her butchered body. We thought that every piece of broken glass found Merle's poor limp body and sliced as it hit. She had lost a lot of blood. The telling sign that reminded all of us of this tornado for the remainder of her life was the absence of an ear. It had been sliced off smooth with her face. Jean escaped without a scratch! However, she did have

about a gallon of cooking oil spilled in her hair. Jane had one pinky fingernail mashed. Nothing else! By the grace of our God, we all survived! However, for the remainder of our childhood, every thunderstorm that came and every thunder and lightning that crashed, Mother would gather us up and rush across the road to Uncle Henry's "storm house." We spent countless stormy nights underground in that dingy, damp, dark, shelf-lined, underground room. The shelves were barely wide enough for us to stretch out, cover up, and try to sleep. I will always remember the trembling voice of our mom as she would shout, "Y'all get ready to go. There's a cloud coming!" Until the time of her death, Mother was always horrified of bad, stormy weather.

After the storm, as my father made the trek home from war and topped the hill, not knowing if his family was alive and well or not, he surrendered the remainder of his life to the Lord Jesus Christ. He pledged, "Good or bad, whatever the situation, I'll serve you with all I am." He was ordained by Goings Hill Baptist Church, which was located between Nacogdoches and Douglas, Texas.

Because he had been a cook and baker in the army, and later in the merchant marines, my dad was given a trainer's position in the government Cooks and Bakers School in Nacogdoches. I remember hanging around as he taught GI's how to make donuts, cakes, cookies, tarts, and other pastries. Later on, he went in to business with a man named Mr. Joe Beard and worked at the Star Bakery in Nacogdoches. He also became a part-time pastor of both Springhill Baptist Church and Attoyac Baptist Church in the eastern part of Nacogdoches County, Texas.

I well remember those Sunday morning trips to church and the Sunday evening trips back home. The dirt roads, which became almost impassable when it rained, and our

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I well remember those Sunday morning trips to church and the Sunday evening trips back home. The dirt roads, which became almost impassable when it rained, and our

old 1939 Ford, are among my fond memories. The summer after these memorable trips occurred, our family moved to Blackjack and rented a small house from a man named Jack Hardy, who was a deacon in the church at Blackjack.

Once we had moved to this new town, my sister Jane and I began school at the two-room schoolhouse in Blackjack. I was in the fourth grade, and she was in the second grade. Grades one through three were in one room, and grades four through six were in the other room. We often walked the two miles to and from school, fully embracing the "country life." Jean, our older sister, and I were in charge of feeding and caring for the 3,000 chickens, which helped our family with a little income. It was during this time that our father worked in the Star Bakery in Nacogdoches.

Our time in the country was a special time for our family. For our Dad, his time in the church at Blackjack was valuable for him, and the experience he gained there made him one of the young preachers in great demand for revivals and conferences. I remember going to ponds and creeks where dozens of people would be baptized following revivals that he had preached.

In a year or two, we moved to Pasadena, Texas, where our father became the pastor of the Bethel Baptist Church, a new church plant that was meeting in a school building. The church grew by leaps and bounds, and soon purchased land and built a nice church building. I was deeply involved in Little League Baseball, Galileans (a boys' group at church), and other sports. It was on a Monday night during a revival at our church with Bro. T.H. "Tom" Honea as evangelist that my sister Jean and I trusted Jesus as our Savior. This was the beginning of a tremendous ride down a road of blessings, trials, work, and joy. Trusting in Christ that night eventually led me to experience God's work in Texas, Mexico, Latin America, and around the world. In the more than 48

countries where I have seen God working, God is using the lives of countless people to plant churches that reach many for Christ.

After five years in Pasadena, our father was called to the North Side Baptist Church in Conroe, Texas, where I continued to participate in Pony League baseball, football, and track until I finished junior high school. I made many friends, some of whom have passed from this life, and others whom I am friends with to this day. At mid-term during my sophomore year, we moved to Liberty, Texas, where Dad became pastor of the Jefferson Drive Baptist Church. I graduated from Liberty High School in 1961. I loved life at Liberty. I made great friends with some of the finest boys in town, all of whom were the best athletes in school. I played, football, baseball, ran track, and lettered in poetry interpretation. My mother was more proud of the poetry marks than all the sports letters. For some unknown reason, my classmates elected me as the secretary of our senior class. We were a pretty close-knit group of friends.

The church in Liberty was another growing experience for our family. One of the deacons in the church, Dempsie Henley, was the mayor of the city of Liberty. I worked one summer on his ranch, which was called "The Beef Head Ranch." I lived on the ranch that summer, and my job was to care for the newborn calves. There was an epidemic of screwworms back in those days, and we doctored the umbilical cord of the newborn calves to keep the flies from laying their eggs in the belly buttons, where the screwworms could grow and eventually kill the calf.

It was an interesting summer in the area known as the "Big Thicket" of Southeast Texas. I well remember that during that summer, Roy Harris, a boxer from Cut 'N Shoot, Texas, fought the heavyweight champion, Floyd Patterson. The Harris family is an acquaintance of our family even

now. The following two summers, I worked for Austin Bridge Company helping build a bridge across the Trinity River on Highway 90 in Liberty. Mr. Red Bradley was my boss, and he was also a member of our church. Naturally, there were many exciting experiences working on the bridge. It was cool! When it was time for me to buy my first car, Dad had helped me buy a 1956 two-door hardtop Chevy Bel-Air. It was the coolest car in high school, but it stood out everywhere. If I lent it to a friend, I would be accused of whatever he did. I constantly stayed on somebody's list.

Upon graduation, I returned to Nacogdoches, the town of my birth, to enter Stephen F. Austin State Teachers' College, which would later become Stephen F. Austin University. The first semester I lived with my grandmother, but I would have preferred to be on campus to party with my friends. I soon moved in with a friend, Joe Peters, who was a member of one of the BMA churches in the area. We lived in the old "units" men's dorms at SFA. After my first year at college, I ran out of the money I had earned during the previous two summers working for the Austin Bridge Company. At that time, my parents had moved to San Antonio, Texas, to pastor the Meadow Brook Baptist Church. I lived with them for a year, during which time I worked for S.S. Simmons Wholesale Grocery Warehouse. I began as an "order puller," gathering boxes of groceries to load on delivery trucks. I was soon promoted to a frozen food truck driver, and later a delivery truck driver. I eventually earned enough money to buy a 1962 Chevy Corvair Spyder.

In my college and career days, my friends were not believers, and I succumbed to their influence on my life, beginning to participate in some of their activities. Although I attended church with my parents, my walk with the Lord was not one of a committed believer. The political climate of the United States was disturbing to me. I was "free,

white, twenty-one, and classified I-A" by the USA draft. The "Cuban Crisis" was in full disarray, and I had two options for the future of my life: I could return to college, or I could be drafted by the Armed Forces of the United States. I really considered joining the Marines with some of my high school friends; however, Jane, my younger sister, graduated from high school and begged me to go with her to Jacksonville Baptist College. She and my family were praying that God would lead me away from the life I was living in San Antonio.

In August of 1963, Jane and I drove to Jacksonville, Texas. Jacksonville College was a strain for me in my lifestyle. There was only one other non-preacher on campus, and he became my roommate. We found a bit of strength in each other's friendship, but little by little we began to blend with the JBC culture. I even joined the choir, went to chapel, and met my future wife, Martha Lucas. She seldom accepted my invitations to go to a movie or ball game. However, in March of 1964, she invited me to go with her to the annual Bible Conference. The Bible Conference was held that year, as it had been for many years, in the old gymnasium on campus. Wooden folding chairs were placed on the gym floor and a makeshift platform was erected for the speakers. Martha's dad was a deacon in the church where she had grown up, and it so happened that her pastor, Gaylan Henry, was bringing the annual message. He preached from Daniel, and man, did he describe me and my hypocrisy. I thought, "She has told him all about my lack of spirituality, my vices, and every bad thing she could think of about me."

I had not heard the voice of God strongly for several years, but that night, after the Bible Conference, I heard him calling me to serve him for the remainder of my life. What an unforgettable night. I had grown up being a "preacher's kid." I had not only seen the difficulties of pastoral ministry, but I had lived it. I hated that life! I would rather do anything

than go back into that life that only God-led, empowered men can tolerate. Most of you will not get this experience. It is not for special men, not for smart men, and surely not for holy men. Only those men who have heard that "calling voice" will understand the power and loudness of that silent call. Struggling, not being able to sleep, I went to the room of my suite mate and almost immediately upon awaking, he said, "How can they believe in him in whom they have not heard..."

We talked, prayed, cried, and in the wee hours of that morning, I gave the remainder of my life to the God who was calling me. I really did not think I was surrendering "to preach." I did not want to preach. I wanted to serve him, honor him, and tell folks about him, but I really did not think about preaching, or, most negatively, pastoring. In those days, there were not many areas of ministry. It was preaching, pastoring, or nothing.

I really hesitated to call my father and tell him that God had called me into his ministry. However, I knew that he would want to know. My dad was not an openly affectionate man. He never hugged or kissed, but he did not have to do those things. We knew he loved us and worked hard to provide for us. When I called him, I hesitantly told him that God had chosen me to serve him in ministry. Dad said, "Son, that's good, but listen to me. If you can do anything else in his service than 'preach,' do it. But if you can't, then serve him with all of your might." I answered, "I will, thanks."

Music people were in high demand in the church, but there was no demand for a 20-year-old kid preacher. My life was ready for the change God was making in me. I was licensed to the ministry by Travis Street Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Texas, on March 8, 1964. Bro. Hansel Pierce was the pastor. I went to Travis Street with Martha and a large group of college kids. The church folks were good to

me.

In the college, there was a Ministerial Alliance made up of all the "preacher boys" who were in school there. Well, I joined, and the very next week I was elected to preach to all the preacher boys. About the only Scripture I knew, other than Psalm 23, was Romans 10, which had been quoted to me the week before as the Lord was calling me to his ministry. All I remember about that meeting was that my "sermon" lasted seven minutes...seven long minutes which seemed like an eternity. I have no idea how the churches in that area of Texas knew of my surrender to ministry, but I was asked to speak at many of the area churches during the next few weeks. Needless to say, I had to begin reading, studying, and praying for sermon material. Martha and I had jokingly talked about marriage, and I invited her to go with me to an area church where I had been invited to preach on a Wednesday evening. The church was Friendship Baptist Church in the Corine community near Jacksonville.

Martha had said that she did not want to marry a preacher. Her sister had met her preacher husband at JBC, and Martha just did not want to marry a preacher. Nevertheless, I asked her to go with me, listen to me, judge me, and then decide whether or not she would become my wife. We drove out to the church, and I preached the same sermonette that I had preached to the "boys," but with more liberty, wisdom, and spiritual insight. I really felt that I had done a marvelous job preaching that "really great" sermon. It lasted twelve minutes.

The people gave me a small offering for which I was thankful and very surprised (I was to become the pastor of that church a few years later while a student in the BMA Seminary). As we drove back to the college, she was silent! Not one word about the sermon, about church, about marriage, nothing! As I walked her to the girls' dorm, I asked,

“Well, what do you think? Will you marry me or not?” She reluctantly said, “Well, I have decided that you can’t preach enough to make much of a difference, so yes I will marry you!” I thought she was joking. Well, that was my proposal and her answer. We continued to talk about the possibility and about plans for the future.

I worked that summer in Tennessee and Kentucky with a survey group on a pipeline for Columbia Gulf Transmission Company. I learned that my faith would be tried by these men and their lifestyles. God’s grace proved strong and sweet not only to protect me, but also to use me, and two of my friends on the crew came to Christ that summer. With the little money I had saved, and with plans to return to college in Nacogdoches, Martha and I were married on September 12, 1964. My dad performed our wedding in the Hemphill Street Baptist Church in Ft. Worth where Martha had been reared, saved, and where her dad was a deacon. Our honeymoon was at the Ramada Inn there in town, and the next day we drove to Nacogdoches where I would re-enter school. We rented a room in the home of a Methodist preacher’s widow. For me, it was bittersweet: bitter because I had a new “mother” who had an answer for every question that could have entered my mind, but sweet because of my new bride and the journey we were beginning in the service of our Master.

After a couple of months, we moved to a little house on the east side of town. I enrolled in college, and Martha began to work at Turner’s Pharmacy. She earned \$8.00 a day, and it became evident that I also had to get a job. My uncle was one of the bosses at Dewitt Hatcheries, and he gave me a job cleaning incubators from 8 o’clock at night to 3 o’clock in the morning. I earned fifty cents per hour. With her eight dollars and my three-fifty, we were forced to learn to live in a modest, college student/married couple’s dilemma. I asked

my uncle for more hours, and he changed my work from cleaning incubators to cleaning chicken houses at night with a shovel, trailer, and tractor. I would shovel the "litter" onto the trailer, then spread it on the pasture land near the broiler houses. I continued to earn fifty cents an hour, but now could work on Saturdays also, so our lives became very occupied in study and work.

My major was English Literature, and my minor was Spanish. I wanted the Bachelor of Arts degree, and needed 18 hours of a foreign language. The requirement was 24 hours for a minor, so after the 18 hours, I chose Spanish as my minor, not knowing that God was going to send me to a Spanish-speaking country to live half my life. Two of my Spanish professors were from Spain, and they were fascinated with the Texas lifestyle. They wore cowboy boots, hats, belts, and the like. Since I had been born in Nacogdoches and had spent my youth hunting with my father, I knew the woods, fields, and countryside of the area. I hunted faithfully when I had time, and would find old cow skulls, which I would take home, clean, and give to my Spanish professors.

I made very good grades in my Spanish classes, ultimately being offered a fellowship to go to Spain and return as a teacher in the Spanish department. The head of the department called me into his office and seriously offered this position to me in a very professional manner. Dr. Hernandez was a light-complexioned Spanish gentleman who was rather bald. As he offered the fellowship to me, I politely told him that God had called me to serve him, and that I was planning to attend seminary and study the Bible. His bald head became a glowing red as he shouted, "I'm offering you all the books of the world and you are choosing one book over all of them? You are the dumbest student I have ever had!" I felt really good that I had been called by God to make him mad about the Bible. I told him, "If the Bible is not true,

then you and I will both die with no hope. But, if the Bible is true, I will gain all its promises and you will lose yourself in eternity." His bald head glowed brighter. "Mr. Johnson, I never want to see you again. Go!" he shouted. I was really at peace as I left his office and briskly walked to the office of Dr. Muñoz, the other professor from Spain. I thanked him for his friendship and help in my Spanish education. I never saw either of them again. However, I was very satisfied with my meeting with Dr. Hernandez and felt as if I had won a sweet victory.

THE FIRST CHURCH

We joined the College Heights Baptist Church where Bro. E. L. Jones was the very busy pastor. We immediately had to face the decision of giving a tenth of our earnings to the Lord. We prayed and committed one tenth of our income to the ministry of our church. Somehow, God sustained us as we worked, studied, worked, and worked some more.

The Lord provided Martha with a much better job with Moore Business Forms. She became the payroll clerk and our income was more than doubled. One morning, Bro. Jones called me and asked me to come to his office. I was concerned that I had done something that was causing a problem in our church. At times, I would smoke a cigar or a pipe, and being convicted that I should not do that, I figured he was going to fuss at me. Also, I knew that soap and water did not do a very good job with the chicken litter odor that I had learned to live with. Could this be the problem? No, thank the Lord. The problem was that one of the small, country churches in the area had stopped meeting due to problems among the members.

Two of the men had come from the Macedonia Baptist Church in Etoile, Texas, to see Bro. Jones, and had asked him to send them a preacher so they could resume worship services. They had told him that they had \$100.00 in the treasury and they could pay \$20.00 a week until it was gone. Bro. Jones said, "Buddy, I want you to go preach at this church." I replied, "Bro. Jones, I can't preach. You are making a mistake." He smilingly said, "Buddy, you and I know that you can't preach, but they don't know it yet. You go and preach about Jesus, Jesus, and nothing but Jesus. When they fall in love with Jesus, they will love each other and they might even love you." This started what was to become the joy of my life: telling people about Jesus. During the first month we had thirteen people who came to faith in Christ, and I baptized them in the College Heights baptistry. Wow,

what a thrill! God was actually using us to grow his church and make friends with people in the Etoile community.

The church called for my ordination, and I was ordained to the ministry of the gospel on April 4, 1965. It was on a Sunday afternoon, and I well remember that Bro. Jones was to "interrogate" me, asking questions to see if I knew enough about the Bible to be a minister. A week before the service, he called me and said, "Buddy, I'm going to ask you only one question." "Super!" I thought. "Only one question. I can handle that." Then he said, "Here is the question: Will you quote and give Scripture references for the Articles of Faith of the Baptist Missionary Association of America?" (At that time, it was the NABA, North American Baptist Association).

Needless to say, I had a tiring week memorizing the "BMA Bible." At the close of the service, Bro. Jones made a declaration that caused me to chuckle. He said, "From now on, you will no longer be called, Buddy. You will now be known as Pastor, or Brother, or Reverend Aubrey Johnson." I chuckled because no one had ever called me "Aubrey." To this day I am still just "Buddy."

As a small family starting out in ministry, Martha and I just did not have any extra money. In the month of October of that year, I began thinking about a Christmas gift for Martha. Where and how I could get extra money to buy her a gift, I just did not know. One afternoon, I was outside washing our car, the same 1954 Ford that I had taken to Jacksonville College. I noticed a dog as it passed through my yard and continued walking up the highway. The thought ran through my mind that she's really fat and is going to have puppies any day now!

I followed her about four houses toward town to a house where she waddled up to the door. I knocked on the door, which then opened. The dog darted inside, and the lady said, "Oh there you are. It's about time you came home." I knew

the dog belonged at that house, so I asked the lady for one of the puppies. She was happy and offered me all of them. She wanted to give them all away. They were born around the first of November, and I went to pick the one I wanted for Martha's Christmas gift. He was black with a white tip on his tail. I do not know why, but I named him Snips. I walked to get him early Christmas morning, tied a red ribbon around his neck, placed him under the Christmas tree, and called Martha to see her present.

She cried. She fell in love with Snips, but we had nothing to feed him. That morning we had oatmeal for breakfast, and Snips had to learn to eat what we ate. He loved green peas. We kept him until he was about five years old. Martha's gift to me was a five-dollar bill with a note saying, "Buy gas and we will go see your folks for Christmas." It was my birthday, and a real treat to get to spend that day with my parents who lived in Cleveland, Texas at the time.

The Macedonia Baptist Church in Etoile, Texas, met in a building that was falling down, and in the winter, as the gas heaters warmed the building, it seemed that all the wasps in the woods had come to church on Sunday morning. We would kill wasps and sweep them to the door. At times, we had buckets filled with dead wasps.

I was learning to preach, learning to pray, and I even wrote some pretty good sermons. Our congregation was growing really rapidly, so Martha and I moved to the community, purchased a small mobile home, and began our goal of getting to know everybody in Etoile, Texas. I started talking about building a new church building, because I hated killing wasps and often had to preach after having been stung.

Our very first step in planning for a new church building was to purchase the water permit that was coming into the community. To spend fifty dollars for a water contract was beyond some of our members' ability to comprehend.

During one of our lengthy business meetings, I remember one of our deacons asking, "Preacher, what you gonna do with all that water?" In my frustration and childish response, I said, "Well if you will get saved, I'll baptize you in some of it." I later asked his forgiveness for my response, but we got the water contract. I drew the plans for a new church building and found that we could build it with \$20,000. Where would we get that kind of money? The banker told me that he had a plan. If I could get twenty signatures that would stand good for one thousand dollars each, he would lend me the money. I went to work.

Bro. Rufus Burnaman—a dear old saint of God—and I were the first two signatures. There was a wealthy man in our community who received a royalty from every cord of pulpwood that was cut in that area of Nacogdoches county. I went to visit him because his wife was a faithful member of our church. I convinced him to sign the commitment. As I went to others in the community, I would tell them, "Don't worry. You will not have to pay the thousand dollars you are signing for. If we can't pay it, we know someone who will take care of it." We got the twenty signatures, secured the loan and, by the grace of God, we built a brick church building. Our church grew to almost capacity in the three years that we worked there.

I graduated from SFA in August 1966 with a degree in English Literature and a minor in Spanish. It was during that time I had the "lovely" meeting with the head of the Foreign Language Department. I was blessed to be given a teaching job at Woden High School where I taught high school English, helped coach basketball, and drove the school bus from Etoile to Woden. As Martha continued to work in Nacogdoches at the business forms place, and I taught school and pastored the church, we became acquainted with the people in the community. We found a joy that we

had not known as we watched God transform the lives of many of those people. Brother Jones had told me, "God will always bless four things in his ministry more than he will bless anything else, four things: W-O-R-K." I quickly learned that he was right. One can pray all day long, but if he does not work, he will never build a church. He can study all day long, but if he does not work, he will never build a church. I learned that God blesses the combination of these tasks only when there is W-O-R-K included in the ministry. The experience of working with the church in Etoile really helped prepare me to serve God in foreign countries. I had to learn to work with the people.

There was one young man whose wife was a member of our church and we earnestly prayed for him to be saved. I visited him often, and we talked about hunting, fishing, and other things that interested him. He worked the graveyard shift at the paper mill in Lufkin, Texas, and he would often come by my trailer as he returned home from his job. One morning he knocked on my door and began to shout, "Preacher, get up! Let's go get them ducks!" It was freezing cold that morning, and I hurriedly dressed, got my gun, joined him in his pick-up truck, and headed for the river. We put his boat in the water, and I had no idea that he had been drinking. In the darkness of the morning, he sped up the river as fast as his boat would go. With freezing tears blowing into my ears, we rounded a huge bend in the river as daylight approached and he began to shout, "There they are! Hundreds of ducks! Shoot 'em, shoot 'em on the water! Shoot them ____ ducks!" I emptied my shotgun shooting the shadows in the dawning of the morning. He stopped the boat and almost fell out of the boat laughing. Then he said, "Otis ____ is gonna kill you. You have shot his decoys all to pieces. He's gonna kill you, preacher!"

It took me most of the morning to convince him that I needed to retrieve the "wounded" decoys, take them to the owner, and offer to replace them in my apology. I did all the above and became friends with the owner. Several of his children began to come to church, and some were saved. I did not even have to replace his decoys. By the way, Wayne, the friend with the boat, became a Christian, deacon, and leader in the church. Among the problems of every-day life, the people found love in the message of Jesus. They had a will to work, and together we saw God do great things in our community.

One of the very best-known men in Etoile was a gentle little man named Bean. He actually lived on the river. He fished every day, hunted every day during season, and always had live fish in a trap in the river to be fried at any time. I worked with a sizable group of boys in the community and planned to have a camp-out with them down by the river at Bean's old bus body that he had adapted into a camp area. He graciously offered to fry fish for us and help me with the camp-out. We had a great time, and for the first time he heard the gospel as I taught the boys that night around the campfire.

I continued to visit and work with Bean and had a great desire to lead him to faith in Christ. His constant response was, "You know, I can get closer to God out here on the river on Sunday morning than I can sitting behind some of those people down there in that church." Patiently, I continued to love him, fish and hunt with him, and pray for him. Bean was a Mason. He was a good, moral man. He was not allowed to invite me to join the Masons, but I thought, "If I make a deal with him to join the Masons, maybe he will come to church." That's what I did. I petitioned the Masonic Lodge in Swift, Texas, and became a Mason.

Every week I would go with Bean to the meetings, all the while hoping that soon he would come to our church. We had planned a week of revival services and had invited my father to be our preacher. He and Bean immediately hit it off and became friends. Though Bean never would come to hear me preach, he accepted my father's invitation and Sunday morning came with his wife, Mrs. Luella, to our church. Dad preached a strong message about the price Jesus paid for our sins, and during the invitation, Bean slipped from his pew and came down the aisle toward where I was standing. He took me by the hand and whispered in my ear, "Preacher, can I say a word to these folks?" I was very scared and cautious, but how could I deny his request? He turned and faced the church and said, "Y'all all know me. I am sixty-five years old. I have known for sixty-five years that I was right in believing that I could please God on the river every Sunday, but I want to tell all of you today, that for sixty-five years, I have been wrong! Today, I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I'm gonna follow him for the rest of my life."

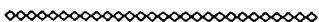
Bean never fished again on Sunday; he never hunted again on Sunday. He was at the church house almost every day of his life, mowing, cleaning, painting, and doing whatever needed to be done. He went to heaven sitting in his deer stand. When his family called me to come from Mexico to preach his funeral, how grateful I was to Jesus for loving him and giving him everlasting life. What a man was Bean! What a Savior is Jesus! God did some super things in Etoile. He saved the superintendent of the school, his wife, and several entire families. Many of the young people of the town came to Christ. I was having a ball.



My uncles and cousins were farmers in Shelby County, and they were in the watermelon business. One day, I went to their melon fields and asked for a load of good watermelons.

They gave me the “culls” that were not “good-looking” for the market. We announced to the entire town that we were going to have a watermelon “supper” at the church one Friday night. The whole town came and we ran out of watermelons. A couple of the teenagers said, “Bro. Buddy, lend us your truck and we will go get some more melons.” I pitched them the keys, and in about half an hour they returned with around fifteen beautiful watermelons. Thank the Lord we had a great evening and ultimately won some of the visitors to the Lord.

Several days passed, and one of the leaders in the town died. I was asked to help with the funeral. I sat behind the casket with another man who was the Pentecostal preacher in town. I had the sermon, and he was doing the obituary and prayer. When we stood to sing, he nudged me and said, “My wife told me she saw your truck in my watermelon patch last week!” He just winked and grinned, but it was a horrible time for him to inform me. My Baptist boys had stolen the watermelons from the Pentecostal preacher. I had trouble preaching the funeral and sort of thought it was funny that we ate his watermelons. I offered to pay him after the funeral. He just laughed. I did make the boys go see him, and I hope they apologized!



The desire to learn from scholars and be trained to serve my Lord continued to grow in my heart and soul. When I graduated from SFA in August of 1966 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Spanish, the church bought my college class ring for me. I was blessed.

At one point, I received an invitation from the church in the Corine community near Jacksonville, Texas, where I had preached that wonderful 12-minute sermon. Our first child had been born, so Martha, Grady, and I went to preach in view of a call.

We had chosen our son's name long before we married. One night while studying in the library at Jacksonville College, I asked, "If we were to have a little boy, what would we name him?" She said, "Well, why not after us...both of us?" My middle name is Grady and hers is Lee, so he became Grady Lee.

The church called us to move to Jacksonville and pastor their church. I know they liked Martha and Grady, and therefore tolerated me. I immediately began studies at the Baptist Missionary Theological Seminary in Jacksonville. I also began teaching English and coaching basketball at Maydelle High School. Busy were the lives we lived! Coaching girls' and boys' Jr. High and High School teams took a lot of time, and at least two nights each week I was coaching games either at home or away. My studies at the seminary were also really hard for me. The Greek class under Dr. Bryan was especially time consuming. In spite of my busy life, God blessed the church and we grew in a surprising way. We built an educational building and continued to grow as God blessed.

Our church had many couples around our age, and their children were the ages of our children. Scott, our second son, was born there, and lasting friendships were formed. Martha and I were expecting a girl as our second child and had not chosen a name for a boy. Grady had some little shirts that had the brand name on the tags of the shirt collars. In one shirt, the name was the "Scott Alan" brand. So, we named our second son, Scott Alan. One of our deacons' wives laughed and said, "I'm glad it didn't read, 'Fruit of the Loom.'"

During this time, I was named President of the East Texas Baptist Encampment. Every summer we would take our youth to the Daniel Springs Encampment in Gary, Texas. We saw God change the lives of many, many young people,

and we loved the people as God blessed us all together. I loved the folks in Corine. Some of my lifelong friendships were begun there, and I rejoiced in seeing our church flourish during the difficult days of the Vietnam War. Our church grew beautifully, and we had no space for our educational ministry. We built the annex with nursery and classrooms. The church was doing well, and I was learning a lot as the church family and our little family grew.

As in all churches, there were problems, trials, and difficulties. I proposed a biblical solution to a specific moral problem in our church. I personally went to the people who were involved and confronted them with all the love I could muster under the circumstances. I called a special meeting of our deacons and leaders who were really a great group of "good ole boys." However, they wanted to do nothing to solve the problem. One of them politely told me, "Buddy, let it alone and it'll pass in a couple of months." It was becoming pretty evident that my leadership was not very convincing to some of my leaders in the church, so I resigned and was left without a church to pastor.

I felt alone, unsupported, and even rejected, but I felt that I was right in my position. As the church became aware of the problem, many of the members came, prayed, and asked me to come back, but God had other plans. I have never been good at keeping a schedule, and I often overschedule myself. I accepted two invitations to preach in view of a call at two different churches on the same Sunday. The problem was that they were more than three hundred miles from each other. One was in Texarkana, Texas, and the other was in Wichita Falls, Texas.

Somehow, I kept both appointments, and both churches voted to ask me to be their pastor. God confirmed my resignation by giving ample opportunities to serve. I accepted the call in Texarkana, and we moved to the Hillcrest Baptist

Church. Wow, what a ministry! We grew together in knowledge and will to work. Outreach, bus ministry, Bible study, and visitation, among other things, were used to involve many people in ministry. Lives were changed, men entered ministry, and I continued to learn about serving my Master. We had to build onto our new church building once again. We added educational buildings, which gave us more room to grow, and God gave the increase. What a ride! The four of us, Martha, Grady, Scott, and I, spent three wonderful years in ministry in Texarkana. I was constantly amazed at how God would bless our work in spite of my ignorance. One thing I had learned not to be was LAZY. I often remembered Bro. Jones' words: "God will bless four things more than he will bless anything else, W-O-R-K!" He did; he does. Then it began!

MEXICO

The journey to our time as missionaries in Mexico began as I was visiting a church planter, Bro. Marion Kitchens, at Richmond Road Baptist Church in Texarkana, Texas. I was intrigued at the thought of Bro. Kitchens beginning a brand-new church. I had never done that! The thought really captivated my imagination!

As we were visiting early one summer morning, a gentleman drove up to the mission building where we were visiting. The gentleman was Charles McKamy. At that time, he was selling bonds, which was a program through which churches financed their buildings. I had known Bro. McKamy since my school days, and he and my father were great friends and co-laborers in the BMA of Harris County and Pasadena in the 1950's. It was a joy to see him again and be reminded of some trading we had done with shotguns and ammo. However, on this day, he was looking for ME! Our meeting that morning began what was to become the rest of my story...

It so happened that a man named Bob Hendley had recently gotten his license to pilot airplanes. He and Bro. McKamy were brainstorming about putting a "mission trip package" together, making periodic trips into Mexico to promote missions by taking interested folks on a "Mission Tour." Bro. McKamy knew that I had studied Spanish in college, and his purpose in looking for me was to invite me to go with them on the initial trip to get prices of hotels, meals, and so on. I reluctantly accepted his invitation, but knew that my use of the Spanish language was not as fluent as Bro. McKamy thought it was. We spent the day remembering times past and discussed the possibilities of making plans for the very first trip to Mexico.

THE FLIGHT

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THE FLIGHT

Bro. McKamy lived in Carthage, Texas, and his little Beechcraft was parked at the airstrip in Carthage also. I drove from Texarkana to Carthage, and Bro. McKamy and I flew from Carthage to Beaumont, Texas. There, we were to meet Bob Hendley and James Bowlen, a member of the church Bob pastored in Bridge City, Texas, which was near Beaumont. We loaded our suitcases and baggage into the plane, and Bro. McKamy remarked that we had exceeded the weight limit for the plane, "partly because Bob was a really big man." As we headed south, McKamy was in the pilot's seat, Bob was in the co-pilot's seat, and Bro. James and I were in the back two seats with luggage stuffed in behind us. Our plans were to fly as far as Corpus Christi, Texas, and land there to eat, get fuel, and continue our trip to Laredo, Texas, where we would spend the night and enter Mexico the next morning.

We were over solid cloud cover when Bro. Charles said, "We show to be about over Corpus, and we are low on fuel, so we will find a 'hole' in the clouds and go down to land, buy fuel, and eat." As we broke through the clouds, to our surprise, we were about 12 miles over the Gulf of Mexico with no land was in sight. Bro. Charles got excited! I did not get too excited until I heard his voice loudly squeak "Mayday! Mayday!" I had seen enough movies to know that those were bad words. We were not granted permission to land near Corpus Christi because of all the oil refineries and the danger of a landing or crash due to fuel shortage, so we were connected with a weather station and landing strip in Alice, Texas. Bro. Charles tried to be calm as he knew our fuel was very low, and Alice was really going to push our limits.

We could finally see the landing strip at the weather station in Alice when the engine coughed, sputtered, and died. We were still about 1,500 feet up, and the plane pitched wildly

for a second or two. Bro. Charles hit the starter, and the prop began to turn, holding the plane steady as we glided toward the ground. We were almost touching the tall grass as we approached the strip, and then we saw a barbed wire fence at the end of the runway. Brother Charles muttered, "Come on wind. Come on wind," hoping for just enough lift to get us over the fence.

I learned to trust McKamy's ability to pilot and to pray as we landed, deplaned, re-fueled, and planned to continue our trip. We were reprimanded by the FAA officials in Alice, and we learned that our guidance system was about eight degrees off, which had caused us to fly over the Gulf instead of straight to Corpus. We were told that there was a good mechanic at the airport in Laredo where we were going to spend the night. We arrived at the airport in Laredo only to find that the "good" mechanic was on vacation. In the hotel that night, we had to make the first of several huge decisions. Our options were to scrub the trip and return home, or buy road maps and fly above the highways during our trip into Mexico. I walked across the bridge into Mexico and purchased a pack of Mexican Road Maps, which were to serve as our "guidance system" for the next 10 days.

MONTERREY

Our first stop in Mexico was Monterrey, where Bro. Pablo Valero pastored a BMA church. We landed in Monterrey, were greeted by Bro. Pablo, and were taken to a hotel where we spent our first night in Mexico. We visited the church building where there were two young men cleaning. They were members of the church, and in the little Spanish I could muster, we talked about the future of the church and their involvement in ministry. I was amazed that they had no plans and no dreams for the future. My heart was troubled as I tried to put my thoughts together based on the bits and pieces I was observing in the ministry in Monterrey. Bro. Pablo was a wonderful artist. He was well known in BMA circles in the States and had painted baptistry murals in many BMA churches. He also painted some of the murals in the foyer of the BMA Seminary Chapel. He showed us some of his work while we were in Monterrey. They were very impressive!

Flying out of Monterrey was a hoot! The ground rose faster than our plane could. As we circled to gain enough altitude to cross the mountains, we honestly considered throwing some of the luggage out of the plane. It was scary and funny at the same time. Our next stop was to be San Luis Potosí.

SAN LUIS POTOSÍ

Gene McCann was a missionary in San Luis. We landed there, went to a hotel downtown, and were impressed with the beauty and the colonial atmosphere of the city. We visited some of the beautiful Catholic church buildings as we had done in Monterrey. The gold, the statues, the images, mass, and the people were all captivating to me. We attended church there with the McCanns, and I met the pastor at that time, Pablo Trujeque. I asked him about what his plans were for spreading the gospel and starting new churches. I was saddened that there were none. His plan seemed to be the survival of his family and the handful of people he was trying to pastor in the church. He worked as a waiter in a restaurant to support his family and pastored the church on the side.

As we flew from San Luis to our next stop, the uneasiness in my heart seemed to grow because of the lack of vision for the future. On the other hand, I was very satisfied with our road maps. The weather had been beautiful, and I, for one, was thankful. However, I was troubled that there were no provisions to include the young people in the future of the work. There were no training programs, nor were there plans for any. My thoughts began to run wild, but why should I bother with these people's problems? I had a church of my own full of problems back home. Flying along the highways and over the mountains and viewing the landscape and cities from the air was truly a new and exciting experience for me. We were headed to the huge capital of the country, Mexico City.

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MEXICO CITY

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We soon arrived at the Mexico City Airport. I had become keenly aware that my language skills were lacking. We had difficulty understanding the taxi instructions from the tower, and after we landed, we turned on the first left-hand exit that we thought led to the parking area, but, to our dismay, it was a street with houses on each side and cars all around us. We finally turned the plane around, found the parking area, and checked in with the flight officials who laughed as they scolded us for driving on a street that was not intended to be a runway.

We met the pastor of our church in Mexico City, Fernando Fabian Vega. He was a dynamic, charismatic leader and a great preacher. We attended a service at the Messiah Baptist Church where he pastored, and to my joy, there were many young men in that service. I began to feel a little more comfortable in my struggle to communicate, and I found that I could actually understand almost everything they said. My problem was to express to them what I was thinking in English.

In Mexico City, they were also without plans for the future in ministry, and their main concern was the struggle to further their secular education and just find ways to survive. Several of them expressed a willingness to consider preparing themselves to serve Christ in ministry, but there were no venues and no place they knew of where they could afford to study. I lay sleepless at night thinking of the possible solution to the dilemma of the young men in the three churches we had visited. The uneasiness in my being seemed to grow with every waking moment.

After a couple of days in the chaos of Mexico City, we left the international airport on our way to the gulf port city of Veracruz. We had experienced some difficulty following some of the roads in the mountains of Mexico because of the fog and clouds, but so far, so good. The altitude of Mexico

City is about seven thousand, five hundred feet. Our little 11 Zulu plane needed every inch of the mile-long runway to rise above the TV antennas of the houses as we left. The "stall buzzer" screamed loudly as we lifted into the heavens. Part of me seemed to stay back on the ground as we headed for our final stop.

VERACRUZ

As we headed toward Veracruz on the Gulf Coast, we found ourselves over solid cloud cover unable to see any roads below. We flew until the clouds were thinner, then we dropped down under them, only to find that we had flown all the way past the city and were over the Gulf of Mexico once again. However, this time under the clouds, we turned around and we could see the beautiful city of Veracruz where we finally landed. This was to be our last stop on this first and only trip. Bob, one of the team members of our journey, had lived in Shreveport, Louisiana, where he had met Dr. John Hall. Dr. Hall was an M.D. who had been called of the Lord to move to Mexico to begin a Bible Institute in the Veracruz area. He left his medical practice and founded the Bible Institute in Córdoba, Veracruz. Bob had made arrangements for us to visit the doctor and his institute.

The pastor of our church in Veracruz, Bro. Alfonso Quiroz, met us at the airport and drove us to Córdoba where we were hosted by Dr. and Mrs. Hall. The past few days had raised many questions in my mind, many of which would be answered as we visited the institute in Córdoba. This is what the young men needed in our churches! They needed a place where they could go, study, get practical training, and go start new churches! Dr. Hall was doing exactly what needed to be done with our BMA boys. So, the cogs continued to turn in my mind as I saw part of what I thought God wanted for our BMA work in Mexico. We returned to Veracruz where we worshipped with the Berea Baptist Church and with Bro. Quiroz. Once again, I met and spoke with the young men of this church, and once again I was met with the same lack of vision and planning for the future of the ministry in that area. I approached Bro. Alfonso about encouraging some of his young men to attend the Bible Institute in Córdoba, and was a little shocked that my idea was not a good one. It seemed

that since that Institute was of another "denomination," we could not send our boys there for fear of "losing" them. I was even more troubled.

I thought of the saying that is attributed to Edmund Burke: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." But then, oh well, it was not my problem. We prayed, said our farewells, and began an uneventful flight back to Texas. The purpose of the trip had been to get prices for future mission tours, which we had done with a great deal of success, but the tour thing never really materialized. God had another purpose in this trip, and he had used this trip to burden my heart with something I knew nothing about: teaching young men to start new churches! His ways are just not ours. Man, was I to learn this in the coming years.

**CONFIRMATION
AND
COMMITMENT**

Upon returning home, I received numerous invitations to share some of the slides and 8mm movies I had taken on the trip to Mexico. It seemed that myself and everyone else were more interested in Mexico than in the ministry we were involved with in Northeast Texas. Each time I shared the photos and film, that same troubling of spirit would sneak back into my being and a restlessness would consume me for days. I remember telling Martha in a half-hearted joking manner, "I think the Lord is calling us to Mexico." I was afraid to be serious and was trying to be honest, yet light. Then in a scary seriousness she responded, "Buddy Johnson, I'll follow you anywhere in the world, but you'd better be darn sure God is leading you!" I was silent. I was not sure. I was suffering for the boys I had met in Mexico who had a desire to serve, but had neither direction nor leadership with a vision to multiply or start new churches. So, I would try to lose myself in the pastoral duties of my growing church and decided to do more than ever to lead my own people to grow as Christians.

In the summer of 1971, the youth leaders and I went to youth camp at Daniel Springs Camp in Gary, Texas. We took a bus loaded with kids, youth, and others. I loved the "camp ministry," and had worked with youth for most of the time I had been in God's ministry. One evening service was dedicated to the message of a missionary who had just returned for furlough from Formosa, which later became Taiwan. His name was Paul Bearfield. Paul showed four slides and spoke for about fifteen minutes. One of the slides had to do with a young man named Kevin. Paul had met Kevin in jail where he had led him to faith in Christ. Paul said, "The future of our mission work in Formosa and around the world depends on our love and training of young men like Kevin." My heart sank then broke as that voice that only a few hear said, "Buddy, I want you to go and help those young guys

in Mexico.” There was not much of a struggle this time. I already had a sneaky suspicion that God was up to something like this. That voice once again caused me to miss the events that were surrounding me during the invitation that night. I was just listening, hearing, and silently responding, “Yes, okay, I will.”

Oh, my! Now what would I say to Martha? How would I go about doing all this? The very first thing I did was ask Paul and another man of God and great friend, to meet with me for a few minutes. Lynn Stephens and Paul Bearfield came to my room and I told them my little story. They both seemed happy but cautious because they knew my impulsiveness. They encouraged me and prayed for me.

It is a great thing to know without doubt that God wants you to do something out of the ordinary. In fact, everything he asks us to do is out of the ordinary! I was consumed with the thought of trying to do what I had been dreaming about since that plane trip to Mexico. Martha was very supportive, and the process began as we made application and hoped to be elected by the BMA as missionaries to Mexico. It seemed that all my sermons were pointed toward missions. My church was supportive as I told them I was being led to go to Mexico. However, that year in the spring of 1972, the annual meeting of the BMA was in Houston, Texas, and due to lack of funds, NO missionaries were elected. I was saddened! However, I never doubted that it was God’s plan for me to go to Mexico. The time was just not right yet. So, I returned to my church and told them we would work harder for another year and pray for God’s will to be done.

We had the greatest year in our history that year, and in 1973, the annual meeting of the BMA was in Sacramento, California, where two others and I were elected as missionaries. The others were Chapman Davis to Israel, and Jerry Kidd to Bolivia. Lynn Stevens was also elected as

Assistant Director of Missions. Now what to do? I had no training in the area of missions other than one semester in seminary on missions. The class was so boring to me that I actually made an "F." This is the only failing grade I have ever received in ministry training: an "F" in missions! Wow!

When the church in Texarkana called me as pastor, I lacked only one semester completing my Master of Religious Education degree from the BMA Seminary. I had planned to commute back and forth from Texarkana to Jacksonville to finish the degree work. Ministry was too exciting, and time was too scarce, so as a result, I stopped going to seminary and really worked hard to be the best pastor I could be. I had no preparation as a missionary and no experience, just a burning, or maybe an itch, in my heart to try to do what I felt like needed to be done in the BMA of Mexico. At times, doing the will of God is not an issue; the greater issue is knowing exactly what the will of God is for one's life. Oh, to just know was my heart cry. This stuff can really bother an impulsive, impatient, young preacher. I was truly, truly concerned about not knowing "specifics."

THE MOVE

On the plane trip we had made to Mexico, and on our stop in San Luis Potosí, I renewed acquaintances with John and Shirley Ladd. John was in medical school in San Luis, and they attended the BMA church in their "colonia." John and I had met in The College Heights Church in Nacogdoches back in college days. He was a great help in our deciding to begin our work in Mexico in San Luis. He and Shirley allowed us to stay in their home until we found a house to rent. So, our decision was to drive from Texarkana to San Luis Potosí. With the help of one of our church members in Texarkana, we built a little trailer and filled it with things we thought we might need most urgently. Since Martha helped pack the little trailer, most of the space was occupied with toys, toys, and more toys. Her concern was for the boys and their becoming adjusted in a new culture. Another reason we chose San Luis was that there was a language school there. I had minored in Spanish in college and could "get by," but Martha knew no Spanish. In fact, she had worked very hard for the two previous years completing her college work in Texarkana. She graduated with her BS degree in elementary education from East Texas State University, now Texas A&M Commerce, on the Friday before we left for Mexico on Monday. There were twelve in that very first graduating class. As we drove south, we talked about things we knew nothing about, like life in Mexico. We stopped at my parents' house in Cleveland, Texas, where my father was pastor of the Southline Baptist Church. Mother had prepared a wonderful meal for us, and the bitter-sweetness of that meal was special for all of us.

After lunch, as we were saying our "good byes," my Dad embraced me and whispered in my ear, "Boy, you can win the whole world for Christ, but if you lose your own family, your life will be a failure." Those words had very little meaning to me until years later, but I well remember them. We arrived at

the border of Texas and Mexico in the late afternoon. After spending a short night in a little motel, we crossed the border. I had no idea that there would be a problem with the trailer going into another country. There was no problem with the contents, just the importation of the little trailer. We spent the entire day dealing with the border officials and finally were permitted to continue our trip toward San Luis Potosí.

We spent our very first night in Mexico in a little hotel in the town of San Fernando. We never forgot the emotions of that day and night. The remainder of the trip to the Ladd's house was rather uneventful until we stopped beside the isolated roadside for the boys to use the restroom. There were no houses for miles, so I assumed this was a safe place to stop, and surely there would be no onlookers. Much to our surprise, two small boys about nine or ten years of age appeared holding a couple of rats in their hands. These rats live in the roots of the "maguey" cactus plants, and are edible by the local folks. Naturally, we did not buy the rats, but as we drove away, Martha asked, "Did you see that?"

"Yea," I said. "They were almost as big as squirrels."

"No," she exclaimed, "their eyes!"

"Naw, I didn't notice their eyes, just their tails and teeth."

"No, the boys' eyes!" she explained. "They were so empty, without sparkle, no joy. Their eyes were expressionless! Poor children," she moaned.

God was beginning to put in her heart something that he wanted her to try to change in the lives of little children. Before we even arrived to San Luis, God was preparing us for many years of service and W-O-R-K.

**MISSION, MISERY
AND
TEACHING MEN**

My very first growth pain for my ministry in Mexico was how to help young men prepare themselves to expand and extend the ministry from their home churches. On that initial trip, in each of the four churches we had visited, it was all the same. Young men in each of those churches had expressed a desire to serve our Lord, but there had been no venue for any of them to do so. Upon arriving in the city of San Luis Potosí, the primary thought in my mind about ministry was this: "How can I begin to communicate my desire to train men in the churches of Mexico?" I decided to send letters to each of the churches in Mexico and simply bare my heart with the pastors of those churches. I explained that I would soon begin Systematic Studies of the Bible and related studies for use in the ministry. But, I had some problems. Where would these students live? Where would the funds come from for materials, food, and transportation? So, I learned a vital lesson: Any missionary who does not really know how to pray will soon learn how on the mission field. I began to pray. I received the same salary as all other missionaries of the BMA in those days. We received \$600.00 monthly for the support of our families and our work. In those days, there were no work funds, no ministry funds, and no partnerships; only six hundred bucks a month to do it all.

We found a house to rent in the colonia of El Paseo on the street called Julio Peña. It had two bedrooms, a living area, a kitchen and a bath. Naturally, we had to purchase furniture, plates, pots, and everything else. I had our living room suite made of mesquite wood, had cushions made, and found some cheap beds, table, and chairs. We were all set! We put Grady, 6, and Scott, 4, in a bilingual school where they began to learn the language. The frustrations were many during those days. Being an educator, Martha was a little more than critical of the teachers at the school. She met regularly with the teachers and expressed her concern for our boys and their frustrations.

Slowly, oh so slowly, things began to change, and the boys began to adapt to their new culture.

However, there was one little fat boy in Grady's class who picked on him every day. He would come home crying, not wanting to return to school the next day. This happened every day! Finally, I had to make a decision. Martha wanted to take him out of school, but we both knew that he needed the relationships with other kids in order to learn the language and the culture. So, I sat down on the lawn with Grady and told him, "Son, I want you to listen to me. The very next time 'fatty' picks on you, hits you, or pushes you down, I want you to kill him." I almost repented for saying that, but they were six years old! Grady was confused. Martha and I had taught them to pray for their classmates and to make friends with them so we could win them to Christ. Bewildered, Grady said, "Now what do you really want me to do the next time he pushes me?" Then I repeated, "Kill him!" Grady seemed consoled and was willing to return to school the next day. Martha and I were concerned and anxious to go pick him up from school the next afternoon.

I well remember that day. The teacher had Grady sitting beside her while the other children were playing and waiting for their parents to arrive to take them home from school. I asked the teacher how the day had gone with Grady. Very concerned, she said, "Oh, Mister Johnson, I do not know what has happened to Grady. The children were playing during recess, when I saw Grady on top of the little fat boy, and they were both crying and hitting each other. I broke them up, but as soon as he had the opportunity, Grady would run and jump on the other boy, and all day long he has tried to hurt the little fat boy." I looked at Grady, and with my finger to my lips, I winked at him. He smiled and never had any more problems with the little fat boy, who actually became one of his best friends. We were learning to survive, adjust, adapt and continue. Little did we know that larger trials awaited us.

HEPATITIS

One day, as the boys returned from school, we learned that Scott had been very sick all day long. With the help of John and other doctors, we learned that he had contagious Hepatitis. In fact, there was a widespread epidemic of Hepatitis in the city that year. We learned of the precautions that were necessary for him not to infect others. We took every precaution, and Martha was our leader in making sure that everything Scott touched was washed, disinfected, and used very carefully. For almost six weeks, Scott stayed home from school and we cared for him as best we could. Then both Martha and I became sick...very sick. Our six-month tourist visas were almost expired and we chose to travel to Texas to renew our visas and try to recover from our illness.

What a trip! In our little yellow Volkswagen, we headed north. About thirty minutes out of town, one of us would urgently have to go to the bathroom. We stopped every few miles when one or the other of us would hurry to find a cactus, bush, or clearing to relieve ourselves. We had decided to travel at night so as to not be seen if we had to "squat" beside the road. Thankfully, the darkness saved us from great embarrassment. The rest rooms in the gas stations left much to be desired. When we found one, and they were few and far between, Martha expressed that she actually preferred the cactus or bush to the restroom. She was so thankful for restrooms in the gas stations once we reached the Texas border. Sick, sick, sick, and, little did we know, she was pregnant with our next son, Eric.

When we arrived at her parents' house in Burleson, Texas, we bathed, changed clothes, and hurried to Ft. Worth to the hospital emergency room. We were told that we would have to be quarantined immediately to keep from infecting others with this horrible disease. Since we had no money and no insurance that would allow us to be "quarantined" in the hospital, Mr. and Mrs. Lucas, Martha's parents, consented

to prepare one of their bedrooms and allow us to convalesce for the six week prescribed period. For six long weeks we rested in the same bed, eating the same morsels of food, using the same restroom and reading the same books. We were yellow. The whites of our eyes were yellow. Our skin, especially around our waists, was yellow. Our urine was the color of Coke or coffee, and our refuse was white, all because our livers had ceased to function. It became evident that we were expecting another child and we feared for his wellbeing during Martha's illness. However, great things came out of our illness. We were able to read and renew our vision from God. Another good thing was Sunday morning T.V. We worshiped with Dr. W.A. Criswell and First Baptist Church of Dallas. It seemed that Bro. Criswell knew exactly what our needs were and he seemed to speak to them each Sunday.

The frequent trips to the doctor to have our blood work done were a weekly chore. We were excited when finally we were declared "hepatitis free." We immediately made plans to hurry back to our new home and the work God had led us to get involved in. Eric was born in May of the following year, and though ugly, he was well and healthy. He was born about 5o'clock in the morning, and, after a long, sleepless night, I thought that he had been deformed by Martha's illness. I truly thought he was the ugliest baby I had ever seen. I do remember eating about a pound of pumpkin seeds that long night. The ugliness was soon overcome with all the attention he received from our neighbors, church, and friends. He was the first little white baby many of these people had ever seen. As a "Mexican born" child, he had to be registered with the government of Mexico; as a child of American parents, he had to be registered with the U.S. Embassy as an American born abroad. This was all new for us and the first of many hoops that we, like many others, have had to jump through. We registered him as Mexican in San Luis, and as

an American in Monterrey at the U.S. Embassy. He was to be the first of our four Mexican born children.

During the summer of the first year, the house directly across the street from our house became vacant. I prayed, "Lord, where will I find the funds to rent a second house?" I had no idea. However, I invited all the churches to send their young men to begin studies with me in September of that year. Five brave, adventurous young men arrived with a strange desire to study with this "Gringo" who could barely speak their language. The five guys were: Antonio Santos from Mexico City, and Everardo Osuna, Alberto Árias, Saúl Velazquez, and Nefthalí Rubio, all from Chiapas. We built beds, chairs, and a table, and they moved into the house across the street. The first two months, Martha and I paid the rent and made the necessary adjustments.

Tuition, rent, and utilities were consuming all our income, so we prayed and prayed. Martha had written her mom and had asked her to ask the church in Ft. Worth to join us in prayer for the funds to pay the rent on the second house. God chose to answer our prayers through one of the deacons in the Hemphill St. Baptist Church. For one year, Bro. Wendell Hart provided the \$70.00 for the monthly rent of house number two. Bro. Gene McCann had lived in San Luis Potosí prior to our arrival and he had made friends with some of the wealthy people in town. He introduced me to a man who had a huge lettuce farm and a huge hog farm. At my pleading, the owner gave each of the five students a job. Some of them worked the lettuce and some of them worked the hogs. They earned enough money to help with the food, books, and utilities. I drove them to the farm at 6:00 each morning and picked them up at 5:00 o'clock in the evening. They came home, bathed, cooked and ate, and then we had class until 11:00 at night. I was learning, they were learning, our family was learning, and our two little boys loved their

five big brothers. All of them loved little newborn Eric, as he demanded attention from each. It was fun, rewarding, and trying. We felt that this was only the beginning of what God wanted with us in Mexico. Man, were we right!

INSTITUTE

One of my problems was to decide on the subjects that I was going to share with these five students. The boys would have to pay for their own books for obvious reasons. Some of the curriculum subjects were: Surveys of the Old and New Testaments, Systematic Theology, The Life of Christ, The life of Paul, Homiletics, Hermeneutics, Eschatology, the Doctrine of the Church, and Missions. I chose these subjects because in my search for books in the bookstores of Mexico City, these are the ones I was able to find.

These men worked hard! They memorized the books of the Bible and hundreds of scriptures, in addition to much reading and testing. We all took our work very seriously, and they were an inspiration to me to study during the day while they were at work. My language skills were getting pretty good, and my religious vocabulary was really growing due to all the reading and teaching. They became good preachers, and at times, we took trips to other churches where they were invited to preach.

On one such trip, we traveled in an old van that I had gotten from the United States. We stopped at our church in Monterrey where Bro. Pablo Valero was still pastor. We spent Saturday night on the benches inside the church building and left the van with all our bags and belongings outside. The next morning we discovered that someone had broken into the van and had stolen the clothes, bags, cameras, passports, sermon notes, study books, and everything else that was not attached. I went with Bro. Pablo to the police station and filed a report. I really never expected to retrieve any of the lost articles, so we continued our journey all the way to Hermosillo, Sonora, which was a long two-day drive from Monterrey.

When we arrived at the Pacific Ocean near Mazatlán, we had no money and no place to spend the night. We decided to sleep on the beach. We took turns covering each other with

sand to keep us from the cold sea breeze. We learned to love and tolerate each other in our weaknesses and selfishness. One of my fond memories on these trips was late one night. As we traveled through the mountains between Puebla and Veracruz, we listened to the World Championship Heavyweight Boxing Match. The "Thrilla in Manila" was fought between Joe Frazier and Cassius Clay (Mohamed Ali). We each had our favorite, and made friendly wagers that dealt with skipping a class or a test or something of the sort.

By the grace of God, we survived the first year of our "Bible Institute," and, by the way, the police called from Monterrey and informed me that they had caught the thieves and recovered some of our stolen goods. I had to drive back to Monterrey to retrieve them, but the trip was well worth it for my passport and camera. The boys from the "Institute" went home for the summer, and our family spent a month back in Texas visiting a few churches and showing our new baby to our loved ones. During that time, Bro. Craig Branham was our Director of Missions, and Bro. Lynn Stevens was the Assistant Director. We spent time with them in the office in Little Rock, Arkansas, and I was greatly encouraged by their love and support. Our boys loved them and affectionately called them "uncle." All missionary kids called all other missionaries "uncle." We were learning that ours was a pretty closely-knit family that was dedicated to changing the world with the gospel of Christ.

Upon our return to Mexico, I contacted all the boys from the Institute and was saddened that three of the five would not return for the second year of study. The two who returned continue to work and study with me for the entire year. They were good students and good preachers. We worked together to help the church in San Luis Potosí grow, win folks, and disciple some of the new believers. We had a good year! However, all the while, I was becoming

restless with a desire to find some place in the country where we could begin a church and continue to train men in the ministry.

Despite my frustration, God began to answer my prayer in a surprising way. There was a man in our church in San Luis who had a ministry of sharing the gospel by cassette tape recordings. Vicente Hernandez had found several towns where there were small radio stations, and he would deal with the radio stations to play his tapes on a program that he purchased. He invited me to travel with him to a town in a remote area of the country where he had a program on the radio. I gladly accepted the invitation, and on the first of November of our second year in Mexico, we traveled to a little town in the Aztec Indian area of the State of Hidalgo. I learned from him that he had shared his radio vision with Bro. McCann, who had been in San Luis, but was now living in Monterrey. Gene had made contact with some folks in the Aztec area and had rented a house in Huejutla, where he made periodic visits. He had made contact with two churches in the area and had been invited to visit them. One of these places was Itzocatl, and the other was Pepeyocatida.

He invited me to visit these places; I had no idea that it was the very same area where the radio programs were being aired by Vicente from San Luis. Our trip to Huejutla, the hub of the Aztec area, was a real eye-opener to me. We arrived on November 1, which is the beginning of three days known as the "Days of the Dead." I was amazed at the dances, the music, the altars, flowers, and the food. Oh, the food. Tamales! Tamales like nowhere else in the world. Some were pork, others chicken, and others bean, all wrapped in banana leaves and served steaming hot. I learned later that the people serve these tamales to their dead people whom they believed to return during this time of "Xantolo" every year. I had a little trouble eating them at first because the

Bible talks about not eating things that have been “offered.” Well I got over my religion and gave in to hunger and the hospitality of the local people. I was to learn a lot in the coming years about the customs of Todos Santos, “Xantolo,” or the Days of the Dead.

We met the man who translated the cassettes from Spanish into Nahuatl, the Aztec language, and preached them over the radio. This man had attended a Presbyterian Bible Institute and now lived in a small town about 15 miles south of Huejutla. Catarino Morales was an Aztec Indian who was very fluent and articulate in Spanish as well as his native language, Nahuatl. We hit it off almost immediately, maybe because he was only a couple of years older than I. We spent a lot of time together during the three days we were in the area, and I expressed my desire to start churches in an unevangelized area. He told me, “You have come to the right place because the Indian churches in this area have lost their way and there are many villages where the gospel has never been preached.” I learned that he had more knowledge about the area than almost any other man. He had grown up in the very remote mountainous area of Yatipán, and was pretty well acquainted with many of the villages in the area he had come from. He had walked from village to village, selling fabrics with which the people made their clothes. As a result, he knew many people in many villages.

I learned to respect and trust this little man in the few hours we spent discussing the possibility of starting churches in some of these villages. He often mentioned Huejutla in our conversations and affirmed that there were no churches in the town where all the Aztecs visited periodically on market days to sell or buy their goods. Spaniards had built the Cathedral in 1540, and, until now, there was no alternative to the Roman Catholic religion in the town. This trip really caused me to think about the possibility of relocating and trying to

bring the gospel to this area where no one had preached the message of salvation. Upon returning to San Luis, I had a horrible restlessness in my soul. Could I be more effective for the cause of Christ there than here? Could I be serious about taking my family to this place where we knew nobody? I discussed all this at length with Martha and then with the Institute boys. The students were excited and wanted to go and see if all my tales of our recent trip were true or not. We continued our studies and our work with the church in San Luis, but continually talked about the possibility of moving to the "Huasteca" to begin a "church planting" ministry.

The "itch" to know more about the area was always in my thoughts. I contacted Bro. Fabian, pastor of The Messiah Baptist Church in Mexico City, and invited him to make a trip with me to that area. He was not very thrilled because he felt that I should settle in Mexico City where there were millions of non-Christian people. In fact, he and the president of the BMA of Mexico would make a trip to Arkansas to try to convince our Advisory Committee of the error of sending a missionary to the "provincial area of Mexico." "The stupidist thing you could ever do is invest God's money in the Indian area."

After the meeting, Bro. Branham asked, "Buddy, are you sure God wants you in Huejutla?"

"Yes, sir, positive!" I said.

He replied, "Then go blaze your own trail, cut your own swath, or dig your own grave. If you do it right, these men will change their opinions." In a few years, they did!

I wanted this Mexican leader's opinion as to the value of my moving to the area to start churches. He accepted my invitation, and, during this time, Martha and the kids went to Texas for Easter break, which was two full weeks. She was in Texas and I was traveling from San Luis to who

knows where. There were no bridges over the rivers in that area, and as we arrived at the river in San Felipe, Orazitlán, we found the river out of its banks with no way for us to continue our trip. We decided to just wait until the river went down and we were able to cross. We stayed in the van two days and nights but finally were able to continue our journey. It took us about two more hours to reach another river on the way to meet our Aztec friend, Catarino, who did the Nahuatl radio programs. He met us at the Candelaria River where we could not cross either due to rains which had caused all the rivers to swell beyond their banks. We decided to leave the van there and walk to some of the villages where he was to take us. I found great respect for this little man. He had old sandals, and I had new boots. I was thirty years old, and he was thirty-two. I was 5'8", and he was 5'2". Yet he almost killed me as I tried to keep up with him going up the mountain trails. Catarino Morales was to become my partner for the next many years. Many, many were the trips we were to make in the coming years. We would walk for hours and days through the mountains of that area and I learned from him what no other man could have taught me.

We spent four days and nights visiting villages where no one had ever seen a white, blond American. Sleeping on the ground with dogs, pigs, chickens, mites, and fleas around us and above us was new for me, but was to become a common practice in the coming years. We met the political leaders in five or six villages, and I was humbled at the hospitality of the people who always welcomed us with a glass of something to drink. I dared not ask what it was, but I did pray before drinking it. I was to learn later that this is a cultural practice among the people of the area. If you are welcome, they will give you something to drink. If you are really welcome they will offer you a chair. If they offer you no chair, then your visit will be shorter. So Fabian and I finally returned to the

river, waded across, found our vehicle in good shape, started back to San Luis, and began to talk about the possibilities of our bringing the gospel to that area. This topic would continue to be discussed for years to come.

Upon arriving to our house on Julio Peña, my full heart was immediately emptied! I opened the gate to the patio, which was padlocked, and had planned to enter through the kitchen door when my heart sank. The door was open! The glass had been broken, and the door was standing wide open. As I entered, I thought, "Thank you, Lord, that Martha and the kids weren't here." Every drawer in the kitchen was open and empty. I hurried to the bedroom and found a window broken there also. Our shoes, combs, brushes, jewelry, almost all my pants...yes, my pants were gone. I hurried outside to observe a makeshift ladder leaning against the wall that enclosed our back yard. There I found a pair of my pants with the legs tied making a bag. The thieves had used my pants to make bags to carry the smaller things they had taken. Apparently, as they were passing pants loaded with goodies over the wall, they became frightened and dropped a pant full. I was learning that stuff is not all that important. However, I filed a report with the police, who came, collected fingerprints, and promised to call me when they found the "stuff" and return it to me. Great! That never happened! Stuff can be replaced and only memories of that which had found new owners remained.

THE MOVE TO HUEJUTLA

SMA THE GREAT GREEN BARN
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In the spring of the next year, the Institute boys and I decided to make a trip to Huejutla to do a little more data collecting. We had an eventful trip and met several people in the town of Huejutla, all of whom seemed very friendly and cordial. We returned to San Luis to complete the year of studies, and together we had decided to move to Huejutla where we would continue our studies and work together to begin some new churches in the area. Martha was reluctant, but agreeable. I scraped all the funds I could find to rent a truck that would move the furniture items and "stuff" that had not changed owners to Huejutla. In August, completing our second year in Mexico, we moved to Huejutla de Reyes, Hidalgo, Mexico. I had made a deal with Bro. McCann to rent the house he had rented and buy the little furniture he had in the house, which was a table and a few chairs.

We began the trip with our van filled with toys, more toys, a dog, clothes, dishes, and gadgets that had not been taken and followed the truck with our furniture for several hours when I decided, "We will never get there at this speed and it is getting dark." I told the truck driver that I was going ahead and would see him when he got there. Night fell, and the heavens did, too. It rained like I had never seen rain! Rain in the mountains is a different rain, and driving in the mountains is a different experience. There were no markings, no lines, no reflectors on the roads that led to our new home. No windshield wipers could have kept up with the gushes of water that were falling. We continued. We continued very slowly. Around 12:30 in the morning, we arrived at the entrance of the town where we felt God leading us to live, work, and serve. To my surprise, in the driving rain, we were stopped by state police dressed in all black uniforms with hoods, masks, and automatic rifles. I stopped and cracked my window as one of the policemen screamed above the pounding of the rain, "¿De dónde vienes?" Where are you

coming from? I shouted, "San Luis." He hollered, "Why are you here?" I returned, "We are going to live here." About that time, Reina, our Dachshund, went into attack mode. Standing in my lap with her nose against the wet glass, she lunged at the policeman. He was shouting something inaudible due to her barking. I was confused but thankful that she took part in the exchange. We were all getting wet. With his flashlight, he motioned me forward while twenty or thirty others watched as we drove away.

We arrived at the little four-room house, made our way through the water, unlocked the door, and entered what was to be our home for the next three years. I later learned that the reason for the state police was this: Earlier on the day that we arrived, there had been a massacre of Indians, horses, and officials at the offices of the Agrarian Land Office. Little did I know that the "Land Reform Law" had spurred a war between the indigenous country people and the cattlemen and wealthy landowners of the area. The "reform" had given certain indigenous villages the right to "invade" the adjoining cattle land in order to expand their allotted farm area. Naturally, the cattlemen and landowners defended their property at all cost. So, for almost the next ten years, there were invasions, killings, gunfights, and threats. I did not realize that I was going to get caught right in the middle of these local conflicts.

The next morning, our next-door neighbors came to welcome us to the town. We made room for them to sit, drink, and visit. They were both teachers in the area and had children the same ages as ours. The man taught at a school downtown, and the lady taught at a school just up the street from our house. Our street was not paved. In fact, there was only one street in the entire town that had been paved. Juárez, the street on which we entered the town, goes all the way to the center of town where the market, city building,

and businesses were. About two hundred yards of our street had been paved and abruptly stopped at the entrance of the junior high school; then the gravel began. Our house was about two hundred yards past the end of the pavement.

Our guests told us about the shootings at the Land Office. Very timidly they told us to stay in the house and keep the kids inside for a few days. Martha was a little concerned because we had nothing to eat in the house and she would have to go to the market soon. The lady teacher understood her concerns and invited us to lunch at their house that day. While we were eating about 2:00 in the afternoon, the truck arrived with our "stuff." Our neighbor helped me find three or four young men to help unload the truck, and the work began to arrange our things, which scarcely fit in the little house. Behind the house was a small "pileta" where water was stored and the rub-board where clothes could be washed. Water was scarce. I would either carry water from the river about a quarter of a mile from the house, or I would pay someone to bring two five-gallon buckets of water and dump them into the pileta. Dishes were washed in the pileta, and buckets filled with water were brought into the bathroom where we bathed by pouring from the bucket, and flushing from the bucket. Beyond the pileta began an orchard of orange trees. Dozens of beautiful trees, laden with sweet oranges, were at our disposal, and the kids loved the orange grove. A block fence that was about ten feet high surrounded the grove. The boys played for hours on end in the orange grove. Martha was glad for the grove out back. Now the kids did not have to be in front on the street where they could easily be seen by passers by. Thankfully, the crisis passed and we felt safe enough to go downtown and begin to meet the residents of our new town.

Martha's main concern was preparing the boys for school. Our neighbor, Leonor, helped tremendously. Grady would

enter the third grade and Scott would enter the first. Eric was a little over a year old. It so happened that Leonor would be Scott's teacher. God had provided something special with this placement. The principal of the school lived directly across the street from our neighbors next door, and also within shouting distance from our house. Martha began to trust Leonor, who introduced her to the principal and the teachers, so she enrolled the boys in school. In that culture, hardly any men tend to school affairs. That's a woman's job. Each school has its own uniform for its students. Our little blond boys went off to school for their first day at Benito Juárez Elementary School. In Mexico, every Monday is a time for a brief flag ceremony and a short program. This ceremony is known as the "honors" program. The Mexican flag is honored, and the students present historical, literary, and political elements. This happens at 8:00 o'clock every Monday morning in every school in Mexico. All Mexican students are doing the same thing at the same time. We were to learn all about it in the years that awaited us. The principal welcomed all the students on this first morning, and afterward introduced Grady and Scott.

Most of the children had never seen a blond person with white skin. At recess that day, some of the little boys decided that they wanted some of that blond hair from the two boys. After school, Leonor related to us how the Johnson boys had stood back to back and fought to keep their hair. Through the years, all five of them lost hair to some of their classmates. Scott came home angry. He said, "I'm not going to salute that ole flag. It's the wrong color." He told Leonor that if she would bring it home, "My mama will put blue on it and it will be red, white, and blue instead of red, white, and green." I caught him that afternoon hiding behind a pile of gravel, throwing rocks at the kids who were walking by in the street. So it began.

TOW SACKS

My main concern was to find a place for the Institute boys to live and study. Our landlord had several "bodegas," or large rooms, where he stored sacks of coffee beans until he took them to other markets to sell. We made a deal to clear part of one of the rooms, stack the sacks as high as possible, and make some bunks where the boys would live. The rent was cheaper than the \$70.00 in San Luis, but there were no jobs available for the boys and no help with the expenses. They would eat at our house and Martha would cook, feed, and wash their clothes for them. She did not know that I had invited some boys from the villages, and now three others joined the two in our Institute. I am ashamed of my oblivion to Martha's needs; all I knew was that I was doing God's will for my life, and I was driven by the vision to train men and start churches. That year was difficult! Adjustments are always hard. It seemed that we had more adjustments to make than were our due. Somehow, we survived. The Institute boys and I were in the villages all the time. They were learning to preach, teach, and sing. We started studies in the homes of several villages that year with the help of Bro. Catarino.

Many of Bro. Cata's idiosyncrasies amazed me. He was full of sayings that were wise beyond reason. My favorite was "When God starts giving, he will even lend you the **TOW SACKS.**" Thus, the title of this book! At the end of the year, we graduated Everardo and Antonio. Bro. Paul Robinson came all the way from Nicaragua to preach the graduation service. We had the service in the church in San Luis Potosí where Everardo later became pastor.

Meanwhile, back in Huejutla, I was trying to be Daddy to my boys and husband to my wife. My time with the boys was spent playing in the orange grove and singing with them. I was learning to play the guitar, and we had learned songs from church in San Luis. I would sit on the front porch in

the afternoons and sing with the kids, and, though I am their dad and may be biased, I must say that they could really sing well. It happened that the first evening or two, the four of us would sing and our neighbors' kids would come and listen. I began to teach the songs to them and they would invite other friends to come the next day. Before long, I had a pretty good group of kids singing on the front porch. One Saturday evening, I told them to come back to our house at 10:00 o'clock Sunday morning and we would sing some more and I would give them a booklet. The next day, fourteen of them came to our very first Sunday school. I had built some benches, so we moved the furniture and held our first "service." This was the meager beginning of the "First Baptist Church."

We continued to meet on Sunday mornings, and I continued to work in the villages. Every day I would drive to Catarino's house, pick him up, and head for the hills. He was willing to work with me, but our doctrinal differences were a real hindrance. He did not see the need to be baptized again since he had been baptized in the Presbyterian church. Naturally, the mode of baptism with them is by sprinkling and with us it is by immersion. We discussed this topic every day as we traveled to the villages. We would stop, sit under a shade tree, and I would show him that infant baptism could not be biblical and baptism in the Bible was only for believers. We read and read and discussed long hours over the matter at hand. One morning I drove to his house, picked him up, and we started up the mountain toward the villages.

He said, "Hno. Johnson, guess what! You're right. I need to be baptized as a believer."

"Well, great," I replied.

A few weeks later, we were baptizing in the river near Atlaltipa, and Catarino and his wife, Juana, both were baptized. God lends you tow sacks.

The church in Atlaltipa was just getting off to a good start and was meeting in a vacant house of one of the leaders in the villages. This man was the wealthiest man in town and owned a factory where his employees made tiles for roofs. I was going to preach one night and invited him to come to the house he was lending us for services. He came. This leader was a little better than half drunk when he decided to direct the service. Our pulpit was a table, a regular dining table like they all had in their houses. It had a small drawer on one side. He motioned for me to come to the table. I stood with him behind the table wondering what he was going to say. Since it was his house, he figured that he had the final word about what was done in "his" house. He said, "This Gringo is going to tell you about God." He opened the drawer, took out a pearl handled revolver with a six-inch long barrel, and laid it on the table. He said, "Everybody listen, and if you have anything to say, you'll have to deal with me first." He looked at me and said, "Now, tell them." My sermon was a little shorter that night than most, but seven men trusted Christ. I hope it was because of the Spirit and not the six-shooter.

Atlaltipa was special. It was the "jumping off" place for us mainly because it was the end of the road. I always left the Jeep at Bro. Reyes and Mrs. Carmela's house. We spent more time with the church there, and it seemed that God was doing more there than in many other villages. This is where we had our Aztec Institute on Thursdays and Fridays in the same building that was lent for the church. There were no paved roads leading to the villages and no bridges over the four rivers we had to cross in order to get to Atlaltipa. It took an hour to an hour and a half to drive about fifteen miles, and there were no houses or stores along the barely traveled way.

The catechist from the Catholic Church had been saved, and he brought almost all the men from the Catholic bunch with him to our church. God was just blessing this village. It was Christmas Eve, and we had planned a movie, meal, and message about the birth of Jesus. The government was working on paving the road, and man, was it muddy, rough, and dirty. My Jeep, Old Yeller, was not feeling well, and as we reached the highest part of the climb toward the village, she stopped and died. "Oh no!" I grunted. "We're already late and now we can't make it." I raised the hood, took the distributor cap off, and noticed that the rotor cap was split up one side and down the other. I took the two pieces, looked at them in dismay, laid them in the driver's seat, and went over to the side of the road to use the restroom. I muttered something like, "Lord, we're in a mess. We have a big deal planned for you tonight, and it sure would be nice if we could get there. Man, I want to be there."

I looked down near my feet and noticed some little shiny thing in the grass. I zipped up, stooped down, and, to my surprise, it was a tiny spool of copper wire. I took the wire to the Jeep, wrapped the two halves of the rotor, tied the copper as tightly as I could, and replaced the distributor cap. I told Bro. Cata, "Get in. Let's try it." I laughed when he said, "You want me to push?" Many times we would coast from there down into the valley on either side of this mountaintop. "Naw, just get in." It fired right up, ran like a top, and I drove Old Yeller about six months before taking time to buy a new rotor. We missed the food, but showed the film. I preached that night and seventeen full-grown men came to Christ. God is good! I saved that spool of wire for almost twenty years as a reminder that God owns all the gold, silver, and even copper in his world. God will lend you the tow sacks.

I loved going into these humble homes and telling people about the Savior. It humbled me to see the willingness of the

people to entertain us as they welcomed us with water and then a chair. However, not everyone welcomed us. In most places, we would walk into the village very inconspicuously. We would go to the house with which Bro. Cata was familiar, visit with the folks, sometimes pray, and then we would leave. I had a full beard, wore a hat, and tried to hide my whiteness. My very blond hair, however, was always a dead giveaway. We began to learn that in some of the villages, after our leaving, the villagers would threaten the people whose house we had visited. All of a sudden, what I thought was going to be really easy became a nightmare for many of my new friends. News began to go from village to village that an imperialistic person with a religion from the devil was visiting the villages. Little did I know that the priests and Catholic leaders were feeling attacked by what we were doing.

Through the years, every church that we started had to go through great times of trial and danger to preach the Good News of Jesus and his love. We visited dozens of villages and invited ourselves to return and teach the family members and friends of the homeowners. In some cases, we had to go to the "Juez," the maximum authority in the village, and seek permission to have studies in the house of one of the villagers. What was easy in the beginning was becoming difficult as time passed. The leftist political party had begun to threaten the people if they permitted us to come to their villages. In fact, the land wars were so bad in some areas that we dared not walk the paths that led to some of the villages. It was during this time that the leftists obligated every man in the village to take up arms and "invade" the land of the cattlemen and property owners. In one village, Tenexco, about half the men refused to take the land from the cattlemen. There were fights, cuttings, shootings, and a great division among the people of that village.

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Catarino and I desperately wanted to take the love of Christ to that village, but now the situation would not permit it. Then to our surprise, one of the men from the village came to my house and told us that about 300 of them had been driven out of the village and that the government had given them lodging in the unfinished auditorium where social events and basketball tournaments would someday be held. There were soldiers stationed in the back rooms of the auditorium to insure peace and protection for those who had been driven from their homes. We decided to go to the auditorium. I would speak with the commander of the soldiers and Cata would speak to the leaders of the expelled people. I had played basketball with the commander and we had built a friendship, so he gladly gave us permission to talk to the people. During that time, two of the men received Christ as their Savior, and they were soon given land where all of them could go, build their shacks, and farm.

A few weeks passed and they were all gone and were relocated in the grassland of one of my friends. I am not able to explain the tug of war that was going on in my heart: *I have got to find a way to win the ranchers and cattlemen of this town, but I must take the gospel to the Indians who struggle to survive.* I really felt like the ham in a sandwich. I was pressed between a natural division of the cattlemen who were my friends and the natives who were my reason for being there. The cattlemen thought me crazy, and the Indians were still leery of my motives. There was so much unrest in the town because of the divisiveness, and I felt totally alone. In the midst of all this, I never feared bodily harm. I was simply too dumb to know that I could have easily been killed by one group or the other. One thing was evident, though: no one else was trying to share the love of Christ with either side.

My method of church planting was simply this: find a house where the people would let us visit, sit, teach, sing, and

pray. Ask the family to invite friends and relatives to meet with us the next week. Some would, some would not. What I learned was that the rumors almost always preceded our arrival, and the curiosity of the people made many willing to meet with us and just "check it out." This helped us and hindered us. Some places were very receptive, while others were violently opposed. Dumb and blind, I would tell Bro. Cata, "Aww, let's go anyway." My ignorance could have cost us our lives.

Before I knew it, there were dozens of villages where we had that "family" and that "house" where we would meet as often as possible to hold services. As the number of villages grew, we had more places to be than we had days to be there. In the beginning, we met each week with each group. Soon, we met every two weeks, then once a month. But every night we were in one village or another. Since there were no bridges, no electricity, and no conveniences, we spent two or three days each week in the mountains. It was impossible to go and come in one day. During this time, we slept in places I would love to forget and on stuff I shudder to remember, but God was saving people in every village and raising up leaders in each group. When he starts giving, he even lends you tow sacks.

The day came when we were to go to the new settlement to share the gospel with the men who had been in the city auditorium. We drove slowly to the ranch land that had been taken from my friend and given to the people who had been driven from their village. We arrived about three o'clock in the afternoon and about 25 men, sweaty and naked from the waist up with machetes tied around their waists and stern looks on their faces, came to meet us. They led us to an area in the pasture where the coastal grass was almost waist high. To my surprise, they had built one bench. The single bench was about five feet long and made out of "otate," a bamboo-

like cane, split and tied together with vines, then set on four posts which they had stood in the ground. The leader, Miguel, one of the men who had placed faith in Christ, pointed to the bench and said, "Sit, and tell us." This was different! Us sitting and them standing around us staring down on us with uncertainty written on each face. Bro. Cata elbowed me and said, "You talk; I'll interpret." Trembling for some reason as I sat looking up at them, I lifted my Bible and simply said, "This is a message from God for you. Do you want to hear it?" They all said, "Tell us!"

Before we left the bench at dusk that evening, more than half the men had received Christ as Savior and we were invited to return the next week to "tell them more." Miguel gave part of his land for a church building, and as the men built their own houses, they began the first of three phases of a house for the Lord. Before the final church building was completed, Miguel died from a hemorrhaging ulcer. The church continues, and many have come to Christ because of the faith and work of these pioneers of the faith. The village became known as "Plan Huasteca." God even lent us the tow sacks.

In the dozens of villages that surrounded our town, there was no electricity and there were no bridges crossing the many small rivers that led to the villages. There were no paved roads, and the road to most of the villages ended near the small town of Atlapexco. I would drive my Jeep to the village of Atlaltipa and would leave it at the house of Reyes and Carmela who faithfully watched it for me. There was always a stack of hot, handmade tortillas and green chile sauce made into luscious enchiladas awaiting us upon our return from the villages. Our walk to Itzocatl was about two hours, to Cochiscuatitla about an hour and half, to Tlachiyahualica about an hour, to Yahualica almost two, to Mecatlan about two and a half, to Pepeyocatitla almost three,

and to Santa Teresa almost four. Back the other direction, Coyolapa was about an hour and a half, Atencuapa about the same. Huitzotlaco, Atlaltipa Huitzotlaco, Pochoíca, Tecolotitla, Atlapexco, Plan Huasteca, and others were the villages we visited and began churches in before the roads were paved and the bridges were built.

Church planting is a relatively new term. Previously the only term used was "missions," or just "starting churches." When I became involved in church planting, I was young, ignorant, and clueless, but willing to learn. My dream was to begin a mission movement that would result in a lot of Baptist churches where none had ever been begun. I had not been trained in any "church planting" program, and the only tool I had was the fire that the Holy Spirit had started in my heart for the people of the mountains of Mexico. As we worked in the mountains with the Indigenous people, I was confronted with a major lesson. This lesson was to teach me that being relational was to become the very first step in my "church planting" endeavors. We knew no one, and our first job was just to get to know our neighbors and others in our neighborhood. We believed that God would lend us some tow sacks.

BEING RELATIONAL

Our three little boys were very, very blond. Better said, they were "cotton headed." The people to whose town we moved had not seen many really blond people, and most of the children and young people had never seen any blonds at all. Our house was near the junior high school in Huejutla, and to our pleasant surprise, the young ladies who passed our house on their way to and from school began to stop to see the "güeritos" or "little blondies." We had no idea that for a young lady to rub the head of a blond child would supposedly bring good luck. Thus, our becoming relational had its rapid beginning. Daily, our humble little house was filled with visitors and every passing day brought new people into our lives, many of whom became our friends and would become believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

It soon became evident that our daily, major task was to become acquainted with as many people as was possible in our town. This became our job: meet people, befriend people, love people, and bring people to Christ. Naturally, we met our neighbors who were teachers in the public schools in our town. Their children were in our house every day playing with our children. Our neighbors, the Ramirez Lara family, introduced us to the mayor, the "presidente municipal," of our town. He was a physical education teacher who had a goal of implementing more sports activities in our town. He built a basketball court in the plaza of our town and began a basketball league. He invited me to play on his team, and we had tournament after tournament in the plaza. Everyone who came to the plaza would watch the basketball games in the afternoons and on Saturdays. But who was this American? Before, during, and after the games, person after person approached me to find out who I was, why I was there, and if I could visit them in their home or village. So, without trying, I met dozens of people and received dozens of invitations to visit in dozens of homes. As a result of playing on the mayor's team, many of the "city fathers" became my acquaintances.

After every tournament, there was always a get together. In this meeting, every team would meet and drink; cold beer for everyone. I thought, "Well, I ain't staying." But then I thought, "If you are really going to win their friendship, you need to show them respect." So against the tingling of every hair on my arms and neck, I began to stay at their "meetings." If they won, they would drink in victory; if they lost, they would drink in defeat. I met with them during every meeting. Never had to drink, never would have, but I made a ton of friends from those "meetings." A lot of these friends would eventually become my brothers as they placed their faith in the Savior. Everyone wanted to know why we had moved to their town. It became really easy to tell them, "We have come to learn from you about your culture, customs, and needs. Also, we bring good news from a foreign country. This news is all about God's plan for our town and for the families of our town. By the way, we are beginning some informational meetings in our house if you would like to come visit with us."

Time passed and the only visitors we had in our meetings were children and young people who were interested in knowing our children. However, we continued meeting people, making friends, answering questions, and praying that God would soften the hearts of the people we were meeting. I built some benches and stacked them on our little patio out back. On Sundays, we would move the furniture from our living-dining area, and place the benches inside and await the arrival of some of the people we had met, befriended, and invited. Our very first Sunday school was attended by 14 small children between the ages of 7 and 10 years of age, but within a few weeks we began evening services, which were little more than teaching little hymns and choruses, along with a brief explanation of some portion of Scripture.

Every Sunday, I would fill our little house with benches and expect the house to be filled. Guess what? Before too many weeks passed, it was filled! We had no room for newcomers, so I made more benches and would place them on the outdoor entrance, leave the door open, and people would fill the house and the patio as we sang, sang, and sang. I was now preaching, explaining Scripture, and watching our Lord change the lives of our newly made friends. People were becoming more and more excited about this "new thing" in our little town, and word spread through our town as we continued to meet more and more people. The mayor's wife and children became regular attenders of our "mission." Soon, I baptized the first eight adult believers in the Candelaria River, and the excitement seemed to explode in our town. Everywhere Martha and I went, people would ask the same question, "Can we come to your house and see what you are doing?" We were crammed into the little house for a year or two while the owner built a huge house around and above our little rented house. This was a difficult time for our family, and especially for Martha. There was never any privacy around our house. Workers were there everyday and they slept outside every night. When the owner became ready to move into his new house, we moved into his older house and moved our mission with us. The new house was closer to the junior high school and nearer the market. God was lending us more tow sacks.

Before we moved, I had some unfinished business to take care of. I had built a "chicken pen" in the orange grove behind our house. This chicken thing was a joy and a curse to me. The joy was raising the chickens, but the curse was the opossums that would come to eat and steal my chickens. I had to work hard to outsmart them. They would come around the block fence, walking on the top of the wall, down the branches of the orange trees, down the tree around

which the pen was built, and steal and kill my chickens. I bought a steel trap and chained it to the large branch of the orange tree inside the pen. I caught an opossum every night for about two weeks. I did not know what to do with them until one of the little kids who lived in a hut across the street from us said, "Let me have it." His mother had four children from four different men, and no man was present to provide for her children. I kept them happy eating possum for a long time.

We thinned the opossum population drastically before leaving the house and the orange grove. Another problem was the chickens. I had a dozen chickens that I had to do something with. I decided to have a party with all the workers who were building the large house around our little house. I invited the lady from across the street to help Martha and me prepare a meal for them. I killed the chickens by wringing the necks, dipped them in boiling water that Martha had prepared, plucked them, and gave them to Clementina, our neighbor. She and Martha cut and cooked the chickens, prepared the "mole" (a gravy-like chile sauce), and accompanied it with rice, beans, and tortillas. We ate, ate, and ate. Then I asked everyone to be seated on the ground in the orange grove, and I told all of them about Jesus. Two of them came to Christ and began attending our meetings every Sunday. One of my favorite verses comes from I Corinthians 9:22; "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means, save some."

Before we moved, Mike Holcomb and family came to our town. Our agreement was that I would teach him what I had learned about "mission work," and after one year he would move to another part of the country to begin his work. We both learned a lot during this time, and Mike was a great help to me. He is the first and only "American" co-worker ever to live in our town while we were there. After a year, Mike moved to the southern state of Chiapas and planted several churches there before returning to the States.

In this new house we had much more room in which to meet, and much more room to grow. It was during this time that many people from the surrounding Aztec villages would pass the house on Sundays as they came to and from the market. Inquisitively, some would stop and listen. After services, they would linger until only they were lurking outside the house, waiting in the street to speak with me. Bit by bit, they would sheepishly invite me to their village to tell their people about God's love. Most of the men could speak Spanish along with their native Nahuatl language. As Catarino and I would visit village after village and meet the leaders in each of these villages, we worked at building relationships with at least one influential leader in each village. As our prayers were answered, we began to meet in some of the little huts in many of these villages. I preached in Spanish and at times he would translate into Nahuatl. People were constantly coming to Christ and inviting others to come hear the "Good News." Soon, we were visiting new villages weekly while preaching and teaching every night in one of the older villages. However, on Sunday we were in our "mission" back in town. Our attendance exceeded eighty-five people in our house, and now people stood in the street to see and hear what was going on in the "gringo's" house. More tow sacks.

EXPLOSION

It was in this house that we had another horrible experience. Paul Robinson and a group of young singers from Nicaragua and Central America, "The Mensajeros Maranata," happened to be with us singing and preaching in our new "mission." It was really cold for our part of the world, and Martha was going to bake a cake for the guests. Paul and I were outside in the street talking and meeting passers by. Martha had mixed all the ingredients of the cake, placed the batter in the cake pan, and was preparing to light the oven on the stove and bake the cake. She had become famous in town not only for her cakes, but also for her icing and decorations. I, too, was really looking forward to the cake and coffee later in the day.

All the gas appliances ran on LP gas or propane. When there is a leak, the gas settles in the lowest part of the stove or appliance that is connected to it. The cold weather had caused escaped gas to settle in the lower part of the stove. At the same time that Martha was about to bake the cake, she was defrosting the freezer of her refrigerator. She had scraped some ice from the freezer and had a red, plastic bucket almost filled with the freezing water and ice from the freezer. So as she struck a match and turned on the gas to the oven, BOOM, it happened. The stove exploded in her face and I was horrified by the blast and the bloodcurdling screams that followed. Paul and I raced to the kitchen and found her aflame! Her hair, sweater, and dishrag were all burning. I immediately turned the oven off while Paul was slapping her in the head trying to extinguish the burning hair. Huge clumps of hair fell to the floor. I hugged her and squatted down near the bucket of icy water, jammed her burning hands into the water, took the dish rag, wet it with the ice water, and placed it on her head. The polyester sweater was melted and stuck to the skin of her wrists and arms. I took her to the bed and began to cut the sweater from

her and try to soothe the pain on her face and hands with the icy water.

Word spread rapidly and the house was soon filled with inquisitive well-wishers. Each of them offered some sort of remedy for her burns. I both laughed and cried. There were bottles of "remedy," tubes of toothpaste, aloe vera, and oils. The "sábila," or aloe vera, turned out to be a blessing and seemed to soothe her pain more than anything else. Thanks to our Lord, she healed with only a small scar on one of her wrists. Her hair grew back, her burns healed, and we praised our Lord for her healing. We never got to eat the cake! She did get a new stove out of the deal. This bad day became only a memory, one of which strengthened our lives.

Another day in the second house, Eric was about seven years old and was kicking a ball with me in the street. By this time, the street had been paved beyond our house. Our German Shepherd, Osa, was having a ball running and playing with us. Eric would kick the ball to me, and Osa would try to get it before I kicked it back to Eric. I would kick it to him, and she would chase it as it rolled toward Eric. She got to the ball the same time it got to Eric, and as they collided, Eric's feet went skyward and his head went "SPLAT" as it hit the street, which had recently been paved. I ran picked him up in my arms and consoled him by going across the street with him and buying him his favorite cold drink. While we were standing there, a little boy walked by and said, "Mister, está sangrando el niño" (Your son is bleeding). There was dark blood streaming from his ears down his neck and onto the shirt on his shoulders. My heart sank! There were no pediatricians in our town, but since our twins had been born, we had become very well acquainted with a great pediatrician in Tampico, a large city about three and half hour away. I hurriedly called him! His instructions were: "Do not let him sleep. With a flashlight, check that his

eyes respond to light, and when he begins to have projectile vomiting, bring him to the hospital." We prayed, obeyed, and prayed some more while we waited for the projectile vomiting. Martha was getting the kids ready make the hurried trip to Tampico. This was a three hour, bumpy, partly curvy ride. God was gracious, and the projectile vomiting never came. What did come was a swelling almost as large as the ball we were kicking. Great pain once again became only a memory.

During this time we had a huge number of young men attending our "mission." They loved sports and were learning to love Jesus. I worked hard teaching them how to share their faith and to present the gospel to their friends. Every week they would bring new friends to our meetings. One afternoon as I was studying, one of our finest young men came running into the house, grabbed me, and was weeping uncontrollably. His nickname was "Nariz (Nose)." After he calmed down he told his story. He had been sharing the story of Christ with a friend in his one-room house. There were only two chairs in the room. He sat in one and his friend in the other as they faced each other. They were about two paces from one another. Nariz witnessed to his friend and had just told him that "Jesus was the way, the truth, and the life and no one comes to the Father but by him. He's the only way." Immediately, his friend growled in a low, gurgling voice, "No, I am!" And at that instant, something hit Nariz upside his head and he swore to me that his friend never moved. Something or someone had hit my young brother hard enough to leave swelling and prints on his face and head. He was never the same. This was a very disturbing time for all our youth and especially for me. I knew very little about this kind of spiritual warfare, but I was to see many things in the future that I would never understand. I hesitate to discuss some of the things we witnessed because I have no understanding of what happened and surely you

would not be able to understand either. I do know, however, that God used this incident to cause all of us to trust more in him who lives in us. One of our favorite verses became 1 John 4:4, "because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world."

As we became related with many more people in our town, and with many leaders in many of the Aztec villages that surrounded our town, it became evident that we were going to have to make some difficult choices. We were either going to be forced to find a larger place to meet, buy some land and build a larger place, or begin multiple Bible study groups in various parts of the city. My inclination was the last! We now had members in our "mission" from the four barrios that composed our town, and my goal was to begin a "mission" in each neighborhood and teach the head of the house to be the leader in his own home, much as I had done in our house. So, we began a small group in "Barrio Arriba" where Bro. Morales, my Aztec companion, had moved. We planned another "mission" in Rojo Lugo where one of Martha's friends was willing to open her house for studies. I had dreams of starting a group in Tecoloco, which would give us a voice in four strategic parts of our town. All the while, during the week we were entering new Aztec villages and beginning Bible studies in these villages. I was both overwhelmed and astonished at what God was doing in the hearts of my relations. I was both humbled and honored that he would use our family as instruments to teach our new acquaintances about the plan of God to forgive their sin and give them the gift of eternal life. I rejoiced in the fact that it all began with our making friends with people who lived around us. Before we taught, preached, witnessed, or anything else, we learned that making friends and earning the trust of the people whose land we had adopted was essential. We learned that if the people did not trust us, how could they ever trust

the message we brought them and the Jesus who was the theme of our message? That saying became true in what we were doing: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Relationships that were formed in those days have continued to be an important part of the expansion of the gospel work in that part of Mexico until the present time. For months I had struggled with the strategy I was to use to plant churches. Early one morning as I was reading Scripture, I was reading Paul's second letter to Timothy. I had preached from this passage many times through the years, but this day II Timothy 2:2 became God's strategy for the work we began in the Huasteca area of the state of Hidalgo, Mexico. It states Paul's words to young Timothy: "The things you have heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men who will be able to teach it to others." So really, as the people in that area became our friends, and because of that friendship heard the "Good News," they befriended others and through those friendships spread the "Good News" to many other villages in that area. God had a bunch of tow sacks and he was lending them to us.

Becoming relational in small groups was just the most natural way to begin "missions" for us in the early 70's. So, in this simple way of making friends and sharing the gospel, God would begin fifty-three "missions," many of which became churches, and all of which were teaching others to duplicate what they had learned. The first small group that began in our home became the First Baptist Church of our town. We ultimately purchased land for a church building.

Across the street from the second house we rented was a vacant lot that measured 24x 32 meters (about 80x110 ft.). I had originally planned to begin four home Bible studies in four areas of our town and not worry about buying land or building a building. However, on a brief visit to our area,

Pastor Lloyd Cashion told me as we lay under my Jeep repairing the brake line, "Buddy, you need a church house." We fussed a bit about the logistics involved and the cost of such an idea, but the thought consumed me. Don Felipe Rodriguez was the owner and owned a grocery store in the center of our town. One morning before dawn, it occurred to me to go and offer him \$10,000.00 for the land. I did not have a penny or the hope of getting that much money, but I felt that this came from the Lord. Lloyd called me and told me that his church, South Jefferson in Mt. Pleasant, Texas, was going to take one offering and send it for the purchase of the land. It totaled exactly \$10,000.00. So, I bought the land and we had a service with Bro. Fabián from Mexico City to dedicate it to the service of our Lord. I had no idea that it would become what it was to become. However, God did!

We built our first church house made from bamboo (otate) and a corrugated tarpaper roof. I made the benches from 1x4s and 2x2s. We met in this shed until the church was organized. We called our church building, "La Galera," or "The Shed." Little did I know that thousands of people would hear the gospel and multiple hundreds would come to faith in Christ in this piece of dirt we called our church. Due to my ignorance and lack of experience, we worked for six years in the formation of the First Baptist Church before it became an organized, legalized, and recognized member of the BMA of Mexico. The "Galera" was large enough to seat a couple of hundred people, and with the rickety pews I built, it was a great place of worship until we built the first church building. In those days, all church properties had to be given to the Federal Government, and in-turn, the Government would grant the church permission to "use" its building and hold public meetings. It really bothered me to build our house of worship and give it to the government. I doubted that they would grant us permission to use it as a

place of worship. Oh me of little faith. The church building is a beautiful structure where the church meets to worship our living God. God lends tow sacks.

Our family had adapted well to the new culture, surroundings, and language. All the boys were well adjusted in the schools of our town, and many of the teachers attended our services. Martha had begun several Bible study groups with ladies in different parts of town, and our attendance on Sundays filled our meeting place. Everybody in town not only knew the Johnson family, but they also knew about the church.

EVANGELIZING

As my list of friends and acquaintances grew, my desire to tell them about Jesus grew as well. I had been through Evangelism Explosion in 1972 and thought it was really too extensive for the job I was to do. I was well equipped in the Roman Road and loved the simplicity of the Roman presentation. However, I wanted something to place in the hands of my prospective new brothers in Christ. I found the tract from Campus Crusade for Christ, "The Four Spiritual Laws," and I used hundreds of them as I explained the love of our God to my newly made friends. The "Four Laws" were: 1. God loves you and has a plan for your life. 2. You are a sinner and therefore cannot know his love. 3. Christ died for you and is the bridge to eternal life. 4. You must receive Christ individually to be saved. I loved the "Four Spiritual Laws," and God began to save people by the bunches as we taught and distributed this fruitful tract. However, I became troubled because I noticed that I was not stressing the need for my friends to repent of their condition of sin. So, as any head-strong missionary would do, I added a "law." You must repent, acknowledge, turn from, and renounce your sin, asking for forgiveness from God. This complicated my relationship with some of my new friends, but those who truly repented and believed seemed to "get the whole package" and the joy of their conversion seemed to spread among our small group of new believers.

I learned that it was important to place something in the hands of the people with whom we talked. I found another little tract called, "Cinco Verdades Vitales" (Five Vital Truths), and this simple message on paper equaled our verbal message about Jesus. We placed hundreds of these tracts in the hands of our friends and our new brothers began to do the same also. We made "big brothers" of our older believers and put them in charge of our newer "little brothers." Their duties were to visit the new believer once every week, pray

with them, keep the visit to 10 minutes, then go to their house and bring them to church on Sunday morning. It was fun to watch our new "little brothers" begin to bring their friends even before becoming "big brothers." What I taught was now being taught by almost all my new believing friends. It was soon to become evident that the making of disciples did not end at one's profession of faith. Disciple making took time and more time. It was gratifying to us to see the great majority of our new "professors in Christ" begin to attend our Bible studies and worship services. Soon, our church was the talk of the town and the continual subject of the Catholic priest's weekly Sunday afternoon radio broadcast. We were tickled at what God was doing in our town. As other groups came to our town through the years, the priest assumed that they were all with us. I faithfully listened to his radio message about the "growth of the foreign religion." The Jehovah's Witnesses helped our cause greatly. The power of the gospel was amazing as hardened men and wayward women listened to our story and came to faith in Christ. God continued to lend us tow sacks.

During the tumultuous years of the Agrarian Reform Laws of Mexico, there were many divisions among the Aztec villagers. The different leftist political parties divided the villages. There was the PRI (the ruling party for the past 30+ years), the PPS (the most aggressive far left party) and the PAN (the party supported by most of the religious leaders), among others. Some entire villages would join the party of choice in their area while others would join another party. It was sad and funny when we would meet for study and worship; the brethren would know which party the others favored. It became our task to leave politics out of our worship. There were times that tow sacks seemed a little scarce, but God never fails.

MAKING DISCIPLES

The overwhelming lesson we learned and conveyed to others was this: "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care!" So now as we try to build on the thought of being relational, and then sharing the gospel of Christ with our friends, let's think about duplicating our vision to make friends and influence people in order to bring them to Christ. The next, natural step in the work of "planting churches," after becoming relational and sharing the gospel, is the work of investing part of our time and parts of our lives into the lives of others. The modern and ancient term is: discipleship! You cannot disciple anyone with whom you have no relationship. Relating to people is vital in the disciple making process. I learned this the hard, but easy, way!

Brother Morales and I spent countless hours in my old yellow Jeep traveling to the end of the mountain roads where we left "Ole Yellow" and walked countless hours to the villages where there were no roads, electricity, running water, nor restrooms. As we drove and walked, one or more of the men who knew someone in the village we were going to always accompanied us. So as we walked, we talked. The constant content of our discussion was Scripture. Since all these men were new believers, all Scripture was new and exciting to them. We would walk as many as four hours one way to a village, and my goal on each trip was to discuss one subject. The one I liked best was just to talk about Jesus. We would learn new terms like "atonement," "justification," "sanctification," and "second coming." On many of these trips, we spent hours walking, talking, and resting. Going to the villages was all "uphill," and we would sit for long periods of time discussing these topics. I had a ball addressing some of their very elementary questions. Some were, "What does God look like?" "Where does the devil live?" "Will we ever not sin?" and "How can we hear God?"

Often a two-hour climb would turn to three and four hours. We normally stopped to rest near a mountain spring of fresh, cool, water where we would talk about "springs of living water" mentioned in John chapter 4. They taught me how to make a drinking cup from the always nearby banana leaves. The hunger for the Word began to grow as our group grew. They always wanted to talk more about the Word. At times, our group would consist of six, eight, or ten men who chose to tag along just for the "pláticas," or talks. From these visits to new villages and from the talks we would have as we walked (or as I stumbled breathlessly) at times, grew a desire from the men to meet in a centrally located village and talk more about the Bible. Subsequently, we began to meet on Thursdays and Fridays in one of the villages where we had a "mission." We would expand our discussions to other topics, such as the Bible, prayer, worship, serving, giving, evangelism, church reproduction, and leadership. From time to time I would teach these disciplines of discipleship, without knowing that I was "discipling" these men into disciple makers.

In our Thursday and Friday meetings, we would learn songs. They would bring their guitars and violins, and we would enjoy just learning to sing and discussing why we sing to God. On Thursday nights we would walk to other villages and many nights as we walked back down the mountain, we would sing as we walked in the moonlit nights. We laughed at times until we cried as one or more of the guys would skip a word or add a phrase. Thus, our discipleship program. I believe that no person is a disciple of Christ if he does not have a disciple. So a real disciple must be a disciple maker and the little Indian guys God had placed me with were learning to make disciples. I loved it. To observe their joy seemed to give me a joy of my own I had never known. In the midst of all the agrarian turmoil, we were at peace with

each other and with God's new purpose in the lives of these simple men.

These men's ages were similar to mine. We ranged from mid-twenties to mid-forties. We all had small to teenaged children and had a lot in common even though we came from different worlds. We called our Thursday and Friday meetings "Institute," which in a couple of years was changed to Saturdays and continued for almost thirty more years. The difference in what we did and an "Institute" is that we never graduated anybody! We had students who attended for twenty-five years and never graduated. We believed that no one ever completed his studies and that learning from God how to teach others is an ongoing, lifelong task. Also, in their culture, when a person "arrived" or was elevated to a higher position than others, he saw himself as "Lord God Almighty" above the others. I learned this as I "ruined" one young man who could read a little better than the others and gave him the title of "Maestro" (teacher). Needless to say, I destroyed his relationship with the others by elevating him, when in reality he was beneath the others in many ways. So, I never graduated any of them from our Aztec "Institute." My joy was not only teaching these men, but also accompanying them to their villages and observing them teach their people what I had taught them in the "Institute." We all memorized II Timothy 2:2 and literally what they learned on Thursday, and Friday, they would teach to their people on Sunday. They were making disciples! Their disciples were becoming churches! God was pleased, and I was blessed.

Some of these guys were really brilliant. Though they had very little formal education, some of them were really "quick" mentally. We worked in Spanish. All these young men spoke Spanish as their second language just as Spanish was my second language, but their "heart" language was Nahuatl (the Aztec language), just as English is my heart

language. All our literature, hymns, and songs were in Spanish, so the more studious of the guys would translate the songs into their heart language and teach the songs in Nahuatl to the guys in our Institute. Then on Sunday they would sing the songs with their people and would preach in Nahuatl the truths they had learned in Spanish during the week. The strange thing for me was this: they could not write in Nahuatl. The language was not written, and they did not know how to write it. But man could they sing it! Of all the missions and churches we started in the time we were there, only one spoke and sang totally in Spanish. Our town church, First Baptist, does it all in Spanish. All the others worship in Nahuatl and Spanish. It was really cool.



First flight to
Mexico 1971

Leaving for Mexico



Beginning of First
Baptist Church
in our house

Beginning group,
mostly children





Eric and Buddy



Eric and the twins



Baptizing in Chiapas



Baptizing in Huejutla

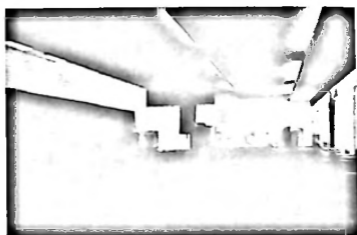


Organizing council

**"La Galera" our first
church house**



**We grew to over
200 here**

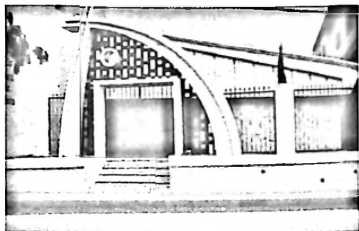


**Our new Church
Building**



New pews

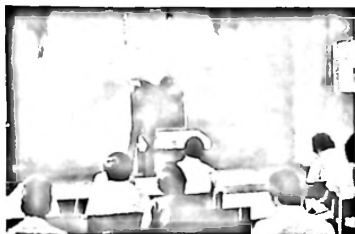
First Baptist Church
Huejutla



Pastor Josué Osorio

Associational leaders
in Chiapas Meeting





Indian Bible Institute

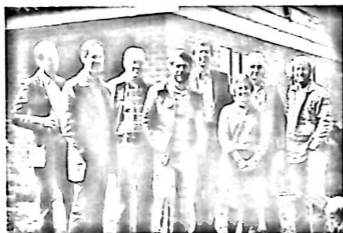
**Our first group of
Indian students
(pastors)**



**Our Indian Institute
students six years later**

**Entrance to
Rinconcito 1977**





Visitors to National
Institute

School program at
Scott's school



Our family 1989

Grady and Denise's
wedding





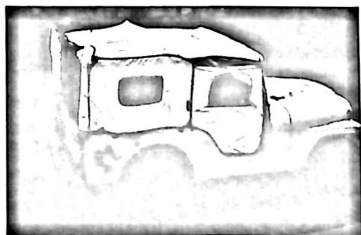
Sunday School
literature distribution

Pottery in Chililico



Eye caravan
(cataract surgery)

Ole Yeller





All the
missionaries
(1980)

Sunday School
Huejutla



Our family
with Taffy



Following our wedding (1992)



Taffy and Sara

MIBAMEX

I had felt that one of the main reasons God had led me to Mexico was to train men who could plant churches and make disciples. After the meager beginning with the five guys in San Luis, and now with the dozens of Aztec guys, I could sense that God still had bigger things for me to do in training men. I had worked for six years trying to plant a good church in Huejutla, and it was finally time to get someone else to lead the church and free me to train men and plant more churches. We invited the BMA of Mexico to meet with us in our "bamboo" shed church. We planned to organize the mission into a church and called for pastors and missionaries to come and help us do so. It was a great service with hundreds of people from town and from the BMA churches around Mexico. We organized the church with 126 charter members and called one of the graduates from the "San Luis" bunch to be pastor. I was relieved and released from the duty of "pastoring" the people in Huejutla.

I start stuff. I loved starting the church from nothing, but now it was a grown, functioning, reproducing, group of believers who had the vision God had given us from the beginning. Toño did well as he assumed the pastorate of the new church. We remained with the church for the remainder of our time in Mexico and helped when we were needed. I continued to teach the Pastor what I had learned and help him teach it to others, but now my role would change.

My itch and prayer for a "formal Bible training school" had not subsided. I continued to work in the villages, in the new church, and in the "Institute," all the while wanting to multiply our efforts all over the area of Mexico where we had settled. A friend told me of an Institute of Summer Linguistics (Wycliffe Bible Translators) family who were returning to the states and might want to sell the 25 acres of land where they had lived for many years. Could this be God's provision for the cry of my heart? Yes, it could be, and

it was. I drove the three hours over to Xolol, San Luis Potosí, where the Larson family lived. They were very gracious people of God. They had spent many years translating the New Testament into the local language of "Huasteco." They told me that several religious groups had wanted to purchase their property, but as of now they had not felt that the right person had come along. I shared with them God's vision for my life and his plans for the future. My ideas for a Bible Institute pleased them and excited them about the future of a training ministry with men in that area. They prayed with me and agreed to sell me the property. Well, great! I had a deal but did not have a penny. Martha and I made several trips to the property which the Larsons had named "Rinconcito," which means, "little corner." I have always been a dreamer and I learned early in life that I would never accomplish all my dreams. However, I was challenged to dream anyway. We began to dream. We came up with a plan that we thought God would use to evangelize and plant churches in all the Indian area between Huejutla and Rinconcito. We would build a modest house on the property, move there, and begin our Bible Institute. With the boys in the Institute, we would plant churches from Rinconcito to Huejutla and we would never run out of work to do for Jesus. We shared the vision with Martha's pastor, and he led his church in Ft. Worth to provide the \$16,000.00 to purchase the property. The same church had been helping us for several years build a two story building on the property I had bought in Huejutla. Our family lived on the top floor of the building and we used the bottom floor for our worship center as we began to build a new church house on the remainder of the property for the church in Huejutla. On that same top floor, I built a room with a bed and bath in anticipation of staying there on weekends after moving to Rinconcito and teaching at the Institute during the week. So here was the plan: begin the Institute, work there Monday through Friday,

work with the Indian missions on Saturday and Sunday, stay in my little room in Huejutla, and return to Rinconcito for classes on Monday. We would change our Thursday-Friday Indian Institute to Saturday, and this way I could meet with all the Aztec guys, study with them on Saturday, and visit a couple of their churches on Sunday. God provided the funds for the purchase of the property and this was BIG!

Martha's home church, South Park, had moved from Hemphill Street, built a beautiful building, and supplied the funds for Rinconcito. They also provided the majority of the funds for the two-story building next to the church building. For more than a year, they gave their entire offering on every third Sunday for our building. Bro. Henry truly had a great part in the thousands of souls who came to Christ in those days. The vision God had given me was really becoming a reality. II Timothy 2:2 was falling into place for me. I was now going to have a plan, a venue, and a vision to teach what I had learned "to faithful men who would be able to teach others." Wow. God is good!

Now, some problems: I needed a good name for the school, I needed to investigate the legal requirements, and I needed to sell the worth of the school to all the pastors of the BMA of Mexico. In my mind I was remembering, "God will bless four things in the ministry more than he will bless anything else: W-O-R-K!" Work is what I knew to do. I did not know how to do it, but every day was a challenge to learn how and work hard. He lent us more tow sacks.

During these years I was continually working on our immigration status. No non-resident could earn money, purchase property, or pastor a church legally. As a result of all these laws, I had to purchase the properties of the church and of Rinconcito in the name of the Civil Association Mibamex. I had placed Fernando Fabian as the president of Mibamex, and he had sole authority to sell any or all of

the properties. He had been very faithful to lend his name for these purposes. Everything was in his name! Risky as it was, there was no other way to get things done! To make things a little more complicated, we were busy with some Nicaraguan brethren who had fled Nicaragua due to the war that was ravaging the country. We needed a pastor for our church in San Luis Potosí, and we invited Salomón Gaitán from Nicaragua to pastor the church until he was free to return to his country. All the pastors of the BMA of Mexico spent a week in San Luis knocking doors and getting names of prospects for him to visit and evangelize after our leaving.

We went up and down the streets, knocking doors, meeting folks, and getting names. We went in pairs of men and my partner was a man from Nicaragua whose name was José. He owned the van in which all the people from Nicaragua had traveled. I learned that he was not a believer and noticed that he was pretty interested as I talked to people in the doors of the houses we visited. As we returned to the church house, we sat on the curb of the street and I shared the story of our loving God who gave his Son for us. José placed his faith in Jesus Christ on the street that day. I was amazed at his joy as he told Salomón and the others of his new Savior. That evening he and the others drove back to Mexico City and the rest of us returned to our respective homes. José had told me that he had to drive to a border to renew his auto permit and that he was planning to drive to the southern border in the next couple of days. I drove home rejoicing at the grace of our Lord. Two days later my phone rang with the news that José and his group had been in an accident near Puebla and that José had been killed. Bro. Fabian and several other were badly injured and were in the hospital. Fabian's neck had been fractured and his injuries could possibly end his life. As I sat restlessly on the long bus ride to Puebla, all I could think of was my predicament if he should die. What a mess!

I prayed with a little faith and a lot of fear. I spent the next two weeks by Bro. Fabian's bedside. I tried to care for his every need and I'm sure I did most of it out of selfishness worried about my own dilemma. Thankfully, very thankfully, he survived and continued his service to our Lord for many years. Believe me, as soon as I received my permanent residency, I put everything in the name of the new board of which I was the President. Bro. Fabian faithfully signed everything over to me when legally he could have walked away with it all. God lent us more tow sacks.

FURLOUGHS

Every summer, as soon as the school year was over, we would drive to the States for the six-week summer vacation. Furlough was a blessing because we met many new people as we visited many new churches. Furlough is also the most difficult part of a missionary's life in some cases. Our folks were always glad to see us but it seemed that we wore our welcome out in two or three days. Grandparents were frustrated by our little Mexican speaking boys. I worked hard to get a place of our own for our furlough time. I bought a mobile home which proved to be a blessing for many years. As we prepared to leave Mexico, I would always call a couple of the boys from church, give them the keys to the house, and ask them to care for the house and for the animals while we were away. Our boys always had animals! There were parrots, dogs, foxes, coati mundis, which we had at different times. They were all pets to the boys. Scott had a "tejón" (coati mundi) which was just a big ole pet to only him. It got out one time and disemboweled Apache, our German Shepherd. One summer while we were gone, the boys forgot to feed him and, yep, he died. Eric had a fox he called Todd. It escaped and who knows where it ended up. I bought a huge blue headed parrot from one of our members at the mission in Panuco. He was bilingual. When a Mexican walked by, he would curse in Spanish and call the Mexican a horrible name. When an American passed him, he would simply say, "I'm hungry." We had a lot of fun with him and with the visitors who would periodically visit us. Upon returning from furlough one summer, he was gone! I asked the boys about him and they led me to believe that he had gotten out of his cage. I learned later that he had starved to death.

I was slow to learn and was really trying to disciple the two boys. They had grown up with Scott and spent more time in our house than in their own. Gaby did not have a house and was an orphan. Miguel was the third of four illegitimate

children. His mother became one of our most faithful lady church members. They worked in the missions with Catarino when I was gone, and were faithful to our Lord. I called them "murderers" because they let all our animals die horrible deaths. One summer as we were preparing to leave on furlough, I called them in and gave them instructions about everything. The keys to everything were hanging in certain places and they knew how to care for the buildings, our house, the Jeep, and our other things. However, they were to NEVER try to drive one of my vehicles. Upon our return from furlough I learned the cold, hard, truth about their activities. One night they had decided to take the Jeep for a spin. Neither of them knew how to drive. They were headed downtown and were turning at the Plazuela Juárez, when "BAM!" They broadsided our Congressman who had just purchased a large, brand new, beautiful car. The damage to the Congressman's car was extensive. The Jeep, however, was not scratched. They had to work for years in order to pay for the damages, and I think they matured for years in those two or three weeks. Miguel is pastor of one of our best churches in the area. Gaby works for the Martha Johnson School and with the youth at First Baptist. "Killers" both.

My next order of business was to name the institute. I wanted a word that would state the purpose. I thought of a lot of words but finally settled on "El Instituto Bíblico Mibamex". Mibamex stood for Mexican Baptist Mission. This worked! When the government would investigate and question, naturally the name meant Mexican Basic Mission. We could not be religious, so we had to be sneaky to a degree. In order to be legal, I would have to found a non-profit organization and register with the Federal Government. The Instituto Bíblico Mibamex would later become the National Bible Institute of the BMA of Mexico. With the help of a Presbyterian Preacher-Lawyer, and with the cooperation

of some of our Mexican pastors, I formed a nonprofit organization called, Centro Cultural Mibamex. It was a little "iffy" for me to do what I had to do. I had to put it all in the names of the Mexican Pastors who were in agreement with what I was doing. I trusted them, even though I almost did not trust them. Several years before, I had promoted the idea of the training center with messengers of the BMA of Mexico. The president and another of the leading pastors, in the business session of the associational meeting told me, "Bro. Johnson, you cannot build an institute here in Mexico. Get us the money, and we will build it." My response was, "Brethren, there is a difference between us! God has given me this vision, and until you heard it from me, you had never even thought of a Bible Institute."

Well, needless to say, I had not won many friends with my stupid answer. This became an issue for a few years, but bull headed and convinced of God's will, I pushed forward. Now I placed all the property and the Institute in the name of the people whom I had opposed several years before. They would meet me at the lawyer's office in Mexico City to sign documents, books, agreements, and bylaws. The constitution of Centro Cultural Mibamex would be used for many years to come to legalize many aspects of the work we were going to begin. We could legally work in the areas of education, medicine, sports, and all kinds of humanitarian programs. We liked to tell the officials that we wanted to help the whole man: mentally, physically, and spiritually.

The Ladds', who also became BMA Missionaries to Mexico, original plan was to finish medical school and return to Nicaragua where they had served for a few years. However, upon John's finishing school, the war in Nicaragua was in full swing. The natural thing for them to do was to work with me in Mexico. God had provided a place, and now John could begin a clinic on the property at Rinconcito. We legalized

the clinic under the “umbrella” of the Mibamex non-profit classification. John and Shirley moved onto the property and began the “Good Samaritan Clinic.” So much was happening, and every day was far too short for what I had to do. Time had come for us to build a building for the church in Huejutla, and for six years we had saved all our offerings to put into the building of the church house. So, I found an architect. He was the only other foreigner in the town of Huejutla. He was from Haiti and had married a local lady whom he had met while in college in Mexico City. I made a deal with him and found that we would need about \$20,000 more than we had in the bank. I got a loan for that amount from the Foreign Revolving Loan Fund and we began work. So, I was a little busy! Legal stuff, immigration problems, money affairs, gobs of missions needing help, building, taxes, planning, and, oh yes, the family! I have not mentioned the family. Let’s see...

IMMIGRATION WOES

We were in Mexico as tourists for the first two years. I hated the trips to the border every six months to renew our "tourist visa," so I sought an immigration lawyer in Mexico City who began our immigration process. In short, the four of us who were U.S. Citizens had to get resident papers if we were to do any kind of activities in Mexico. It took us TWELVE long years and \$1,000.00 each year per person to become residents of the country. In order to do this, we had to declare some reason for being in the country. Martha began teaching English at the junior high and high school in town. This was her reason. Legally, I could not do mission work and I had no reason to legally be in the country. Therefore, one of my friends with whom I had played basketball was the principal of the high school and we made a deal: he would let me teach one of Martha's classes once a month and would sign the document that I was an English teacher in his school. This was my reason. We became legal residents, and now could legally work, buy land in our name, and the like. Our Mexican-born kids never had these problems, and my heart goes out to missionaries around the world who have immigration woes.

Every year, the federal police would come to our town for the purpose of checking on my legality. The first time they came, they caught me completely by surprise. They asked for my passport, my Mexican documents, car papers, tax receipts, and any other thing that came into their corrupted minds. I had learned early in my years of dealing with the government officials that you can tell the truth without telling the whole truth. I became pretty good at that and have caused myself some problems because of it. After that first year, I was called periodically to the city hall where the local police would do all the investigation. They informed me that the "Federal Boys" would be showing up any day now. I suppose the only time in my life that I neared falling into

deep depression was during this time. I convinced myself that I needed to study more, and for days at a time I would lock myself into my office and peek out the window to see if and when the Feds would show up.

This lasted for about two weeks, when one evening it all came to a head. Martha came into my "cave" and tried to reason with me. I was ugly. She said, "All right then, either get yourself up and do what God brought you here to do or take me and the kids out of this God-forsaken place. I need some help, too." That's all it took! We held each other, cried, and prayed. Later, I learned that my friend who was the Mayor (Presidente Municipal) had covered for me when the Feds came and convinced them that he would keep an eye on me and inform them of all my activities. God is good; these tow sacks were special.

So, it seemed that priority right now was the church building. Man, what a headache. My heart cried every day for the little men who worked on the building. I had to find a way and a time to share the gospel with them. The boss came to Christ and later became one of our leaders in the church. During this time, I was spending more time at home because of the building, and since we lived on the building site, I felt obligated to stay close by. Naturally, my love was the work among the villages, and I was constantly in the different missions, but I was home two or three nights a week and at church on Sunday. Eric was four years old when Martha announced that we were expecting another baby. During her pregnancy, we made many trips to Rinconcito, and stayed very busy, building, teaching, and trying to make an impact in the town where we were living.

Toward the end of her pregnancy, Dr. S.T. Sullivan and Ricky Williams came to visit our work. We had a good week visiting the Aztec missions, teaching, and preaching, and the fellowship was so refreshing for us. As their visit ended,

Martha, the kids, and I decided to all go together as we drove them to the airport. We would take the kids to the beach in Tampico (this was our big "get away" place). We said our farewells, and as they began their return flight to Texas, Martha's fingernails dug deep into my arm and she winced with pain. "What in the world!" I exclaimed. Then she said, "The contractions started as we came through Panuco about an hour ago, and now they are a minute apart." We argued about going to the hospital in Tampico or trying to make it back to Huejutla. The kids were all heartbroken that the beach was not an option for today. We decided to rush to Huejutla. Rush? Three hours over a horrible road filled with potholes, animals, and drunken pedestrians was not much of a challenge by now. This was life!

We got to the house about 8:00 in the evening, and I was on pins and needles. She was just taking her slow and easy time as she sang in the shower while I was sitting in the truck going crazy. We made it to the clinic, called The Santa Maria, where our little blonde baby was to be born. We had no idea of the gender of the baby, but now that we had three boys we just knew that this one would be a little girl. When the baby was born at 8:20, the doctor, his wife, the nurse, and I were in the delivery room when the doctor announced, "It's coming badly, feet first!" Just as he grunted those words, every light in town went out. Frequent power outages were the norm in those days. The nurse lit a candle and found a flashlight. He somehow turned the baby, took it, and gave it to the nurse. He whispered, "It's a boy." I squeezed her hand as the doctor put his little horn on her tummy and said, "There's another one, maybe two!" I thought about hitting him. About that time, Dr. Ladd came into the room as the second child came feet first also. Before the second one came, I whispered to her, "Maybe this one will be a girl." She said, "Oh no, not now. The little boy will be forgotten

by everybody." Well, it was another boy. I had already made the declaration that we knew it would be a girl, but in case it was a boy we would name him Benjamin because like Jacob's last son, there would be no more. We named the last one Benjamin and his brother Jonathan. Jon and Ben became immediately famous in our town. The next morning, more than three hundred people came into the clinic and touched, kissed, and handled the first two white babies who had ever been born in that city. We all survived! Truly he gave us more tow sacks.

After the births, while they were taking care of Martha and the babies, I hustled down to the truck for my "surprise" for Martha. She loved Dr. Pepper. However, they were not sold in Mexico, and the only ones we ever drank were brought from the States. I had saved one can of Dr. Pepper and had hidden it under the seat of my truck. You could not tell that it was Dr. Pepper because all the paint had rubbed off the can. I begged a cup of ice from a restaurant near where the truck was parked, and I took the Dr. Pepper and ice to her. I think that was the best gift she ever got from me.

God used the trip of Dr. Sullivan and Ricky to lead Ricky to work with me in the Institute at Rinconcito. He and his wife Priss moved to a little town near Rinconcito, called Aquismón, San Luis Potosí. John and Shirley were living in the existing house on the ranch, and because we were going to need the house for the Institute, they too moved to Aquismón.

Bro. Williams and I dreamed of changing the eternal destiny of thousands of indigenous people in the Huasteca, who exist in the mountains of Mexico. Together we would learn to promote the purpose of the Institute among the churches of the BMA of Mexico while we adjusted the curriculum from the one I had used with the first five students. We would divide the teaching duties and the plan

was to use the students to begin new churches. The plan God had begun to give me in 11 Zulu was becoming a reality, and I was so grateful, amazed, and humbled to have a part in some of what he was doing. We began with 11 students, but had worked hard to build a men's dormitory, bunk beds, and all the trimmings. I was excited and wanted to be there all the time, but my family and that "stinking construction" project in Huejutla demanded my time. We worked almost three years on the First Baptist Church building, and it became by far the most beautiful Baptist church building I had seen. It became evident that Martha's dream of living on the property her home church had purchased would not be a reality. However, my dream was being lived out as we worked with the men and women in the Institute. I would leave home early Monday morning, teach in the Institute through Thursday afternoon, and then return to my family in Huejutla. Imagine, four days a week away from home working with 10 or 12 people. I did this for ten long years. Happy, driven, dreaming, and working were words of my life, and all was well until something happened in a village named El Coco.

We had been working in this village, which was about three miles north of Huejutla, just across the border of the state of Veracruz. Hidalgo and Veracruz joined about a mile north of our town. In El Coco, we had won the Juez, the maximum authority in the village, and his wife to Christ. We were meeting in their home with our weekly Bible studies. About a year before we started there, a young man arrived at my house saying that he was coming from the church where Bro. Quiroz was pastor in the city of Veracruz, and that Bro. Quiroz had sent him to work with me. I was glad to have him because he was a very talented artist and "rotulista" (sign maker). I gave him certain things to do in the missions, and soon there were beautiful signs with Scripture verses hanging

on the wall of all our meeting places. He designed the seal for the BMA of Mexico and for the Centro Cultural Mibamex. He was good!

One day the Juez from El Coco came by the house and asked if we could go to his house and bring his wife to the doctor. She was expecting a child, and there was no transportation from El Coco to town. I was really busy preparing some Bible studies, so I pitched the keys of Old Yeller to Pancholín. Pancholín had no name. I never knew the real name of this guy who was about twenty-two years of age. I told him to go and bring the lady to the doctor. In about two hours, he came back and sort of sneaked past me into his room. I thought nothing about it, but I had not heard the old rickety Jeep drive up. About that time, I got up to go see what was going on. Two city policemen were knocking at our front door.

"Don Johnson, ¿Usted es el dueño del Jeep amarillo?" *You are the owner of the yellow Jeep, right?*

"You know I am!" I replied. "There's not another one like it in town, and I'm the only gringo here, right?"

"There's a problem," they said. "The Jeep rolled down the mountain with a lady and two children in it, and one of the children is badly injured and might die."

They asked who was driving the Jeep. Reality is, it did not matter who was driving the Jeep. The owner is liable regardless of the driver. I led them to believe that I was driving, trying to keep Pancholín from going to jail. They went over to the side of the house and whispered to each other. They returned to me and told me that I could stay in the house, but they would stay on the front porch until they got word from the hospital about the little boy. If he died, I would go to jail and maybe never leave. If not, they would be told and would just walk away, leaving me a free man.

About, nine o'clock that night, the director of the hospital came with another policeman, and thankfully the little boy was going to be all right. My meeting with Pancholín was not pleasant. My strict instructions were to never charge people for transport nor for anything else. I found that he was charging people to ride in the Jeep, and according to him, made a "mistake" and ran off the road, and the Jeep rolled several times with the lady and children in it. He had fled the scene and had left the people in the wrecked Jeep. After our meeting that night, he bundled up his belongings and I never saw him again. The mission in El Coco was never the same, and ultimately we had to close our work there.

During those years, we were blessed to witness things that only a sovereign God could do. Many lives were changed, families brought together, friendships made, and sickness healed. In the village of Coyolapa, our church was growing strong and steady. There was drunkard who lived there who had a tuberculin ulcer on the shin of his left leg. I had never seen anything like this in all my life. The flesh had rotted all the way to the bones and he was in constant agony. He had tried all the religious remedies the priests had offered. He had gone to all the best witches and between the two groups had given all his money. His sweet little wife was a member of the church, and she constantly prayed for him. He tried to work his corn in the field, but the mud, filth, and heat only made the infection worse. One night, Bro. Cata and I were there preaching. I shall never forget the torrents of water that fell from heaven. It stormed and rained so hard and the noise was so loud that we could not hear the guitar music in order to sing. We called everyone to huddle around the front benches, join hands, and pray. The wife of the sick man asked if we could go to her house and pray for her husband. We covered ourselves with the plastic sheet we always had for such rainy nights. When we arrived at the house, the man

inside would not open the door. However, he opened the small wood covered opening they call a window. Bro. Cata spoke to him in Nahuatl in that loud booming voice that was his.

“Alejandro, I’m going to talk to God for you,” he said. “I’m going to ask God to have mercy on your drunken soul. I want you to know that he loves you and wants to help you.” He began to pray. I regret to admit that I never learned enough Nahuatl to preach in it, but I could understand pretty much a conversation between two men. Cata confirmed his prayer to me later as I was rehearsing what I thought I had heard. It went something like this: “Heavenly Father, I know you can hear me. There are no storms where you live. Look here in this hut. Inside there is a man who needs your help. Everybody around here knows how sick he is and how he has tried to be healed. It seems like a great opportunity for you to make your name famous among the friends of this poor drunk man. If you could see fit to heal him, we think many people will be interested to hear about your Son and your love for the people. We believe. In Jesus’ holy name, amen.”

“Hey, Alejandro, we’ll come see you tomorrow,” Bro. Cata concluded. There was silence. I supposed the man to have fallen asleep. For seven long years the man had struggled with this ulcer. In the next two months, the ulcer dried up, scarred over, and for the first time this man was found to be sober and in his right mind. He placed his faith in Christ and joined his wife in service to our King in the church. God is good. He lends tow sacks.

**NEW DIRECTION,
MORE TOW SACKS**

Conflict of purpose plagued my heart during those years. To train men had been the vision that had brought me to Mexico, but the joy of disciple making and church planting had become my first love. To train students was the fulfillment of a dream, but to plant churches was fulfillment of a command. During this time, a good friend told me this: "Every man of God who has accomplished great things for God, has, at some time in his life, had to bury his fondest dream." Those who have done so have had to look deeply into their own soul. They have had to swallow a ton of pride. Above all, they must have some alternate vision that can fulfill their calling and reinforce their reason for living. After a real struggle between pride and purpose, I walked away from the ministry in Rinconcito, and Bro. Williams took the reins of the Institute. I began to spend all my time in the work of planting more churches. .

Again, the mandate is not to plant churches, but to make disciples. Disciples make churches! So without much preparation, I dedicated all my time to working in our Aztec churches. There was a young college student in town whose parents had recently moved into our area. He visited them on weekends. He was a runner. Every Saturday and Sunday morning I would see him and his big ole black and tan hound dog running down our street. In about an hour, they would come running on the return up our street toward his parents' house. One morning I stopped him and introduced myself to him. I explained what I was doing and asked if he would be interested in going to some of the villages with me. He jumped at the opportunity. For the next two and half years, he lived in our spare room on weekends, then he lived with us permanently upon his graduation. He became a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine. We spent long hours traveling both by Jeep and by foot to the villages. He never attended Bible Institute, Seminary, nor Bible school. His schooling was in the back seat of a newer Jeep (Ole Yeller had bitten the dust).

This young man's education and intelligence challenged me. His questions were deeper and laced with youthful logic, and together we searched Scripture. I learned a lot as I tried to teach him during those difficult days. The times were difficult because a new Agrarian Reform had made it difficult to travel safely in the region and many people were killed over land disputes. His strength and desire to learn pushed me to greater depths with the Lord. He accompanied Bro. Cata and me every evening to one of our growing number of new church plants, which, in reality, were small meetings in the mud huts. It took a lot of fortitude for a family to invite us into their hut to begin teaching the Bible. The religious opposition was rather disturbing in some of the villages. Leaders of the established religion, Roman Catholicism, had spread the word in the villages that we were from Satan and were "evil imperialists."

When that bit of information became mixed with the "aguardiente" (pure cane alcohol), it was very unpredictable as to how some of the villagers would react to our entering a village. I will share some of these experiences in a later chapter. However, our young vet was experiencing the real ups and downs of church planting in a rural area of his homeland. One evening, as we were singing in one of the villages, I felt that the time was "right" to invite him to at least say a few words from Scripture to the folks who had gathered under the stars that night. The village was Atlaltipa Huitzotlaco. So I announced, "Brethren, after our next song, Bro. Josué is going to bring the message from God's Word." We sang, I sat down, and Josue stood and exclaimed in a broken voice, "This is strange, but during the last song, God has called me to dedicate the remainder of my life to the preaching of the Word of God." God actually called him that night. He preached his first sermon that evening. My disciple was now ready to make disciples! I believe that a

disciple is not a disciple until he has a disciple. So the journey had begun for Josué. He took his diploma to his parents who had moved to another town and told them, "Well here it is. I finished and I know you struggled to help me through the University. You keep it 'cause I'm going to live with Bro. Johnson and preach the gospel." Really, when God starts giving, he will even lend you tow sacks.

Before building the new church building, our dilemma was what to do with the "galera". I wanted to secretly burn it and announce that the "Catholic" opposition had done it. This would buy us a lot of sympathy from the city people, but Josué, Catarino, and Martha out-voted me and we just pronounced a work day and the young folks from the church demolished it one Saturday.

Josué, Catarino, and I continued working together in the villages and in the First Baptist Church in town. The church had grown into a strong local group of believers. We had built a beautiful building in which to worship our Lord. We were active in evangelism and training of new believers. Upon being organized into a "church," Martha and I went to Mexico City and met with one of our very first graduates from our Bible Institute. Antonio Santos and his wife Ada became the first pastor of the newly organized church. I well remember the organizational service. I had invited the National Association of Baptist Churches to meet with us for their annual meeting. It was during the opening service that the "mission" became the First Baptist Church of Huejutla. Antonio continued as pastor for a few years, then moved on to other areas of ministry. We then called Guillermo Valle as pastor and he, too, worked well for about three years then moved on. All the while, Josué, Cata, and I continued working with the church and with dozens of new church plants in the Aztec villages and in our Aztec Bible Institute, which met in one or another of the villages each week. So, finding itself without a pastor, our church was really at a crossroads.

For sure, I was not going to pastor again. There was no other man who could take the responsibility of this strong, vibrant, aggressive, group of believers. It so happened that I was in the United States at the BMA Missions Symposium when the church voted to call a new pastor. As an answer to my prayers and to my personal joy and gratification, the church called Josué as pastor. He accepted the challenge to serve Christ as pastor of the first and only evangelical church in that town. God has blessed his efforts for the past 30 years, and the church is now the leading church in the BMA of Mexico in making disciples and planting new churches. God is good! The church building was packed during every meeting. On Sunday mornings, four or five hundred folks packed into the building, which had only been built for three hundred people. Those from new villages would stop by to observe, listen, inquire, and later invite us to their villages.

Our continued problem was a shortage of "church planters." In the villages, almost in every case, the leader who lent his house for our first Bible studies would almost always become the leader of the church in his village. But now that we had invitations to new villages, and since we were busy every night in an established "mission," it became apparent that we had to include new people in our quest to plant more and more churches. So the church adopted our vision of church planting and began to send young disciples to teach in these new villages. And so it is that the churches are giving birth to daughter churches all over that area of Mexico. The churches were doing the work of ministry very well, and I was thankful for the faithful men God had placed in his ministry over the years. The evangelism and discipleship-training programs were functioning well, so little by little my role became a mentoring one as I visited and encouraged the churches that were dotting the map all around our town. I had not prepared for what was about to occur in my life,

and God had changed our situation as a family and had new plans for our future.

About this time, Bro. Charles Mckamy felt led of the Lord to come live in Huejutla and help me with the busy ministry we were involved in. He had upgraded his airplane to a Cherokee Six, which was larger and more powerful than the little four-place plane we had used on our initial trip years before. I met so many blind people in the villages that I became ashamed for not trying to help them in some way. I sent Bro. Charles and a doctor friend from our church to Córdoba to bring Dr. John Hall to our town. I had arranged a meeting with our mayor, Flavio Crespo. We planned an "eye caravan" with a great group of ophthalmologists headed by Dr. Tom Robinson. The mayor was in complete agreement, and he even offered police support because he knew there would be trouble from some of the political opposition. We announced in all the villages where we were working and word spread to many other villages.

There was a landing strip in Huejutla at that time, and three small planes arrived with doctors, nurses, and supplies. I had rented a truck, gone to Córdoba, and brought all the equipment from the clinic there, which included six huge microscopes, several chests of meds, needles, bandages, and other medical supplies. There were about three tons of equipment. I built tables which were to be used as operating beds. I prepared cots for the "prep" room. We did a lot of work just to get ready for the first visit of Dr. Tom and his group. Martha and the ladies of the church prepared all the meals in our house and we ate in shifts. These doctors were crazy! They worked twenty-two hours a day. It was a killer for me, also; I had to open up at 5:00 each morning and close at 3:00. During the days, I had to meet with all the media people, government people, military people, and the hundreds who were hoping to get their name on a list that

was almost endless. We did these eye caravans for more than twenty years, and literally hundreds of blind people received sight in at least one eye and many returned to do the other eye. Because of the eye caravans, we were able to enter new villages with the gospel. New churches were born, and many people came to know Christ. God just lent more tow sacks because of these “big hearted” medical people.

Bro. Charles and I transported sick and dying people to the major hospitals in Tampico and Pachuca. Pachuca was different. We had to circumnavigate the military zone as we descended on the other side of the mountains. We had to reach almost fourteen thousand feet altitude in order to clear the mountains and land in Pachuca, which was 8,000 feet above sea level. All the legal work that had to be notarized was done by Lic. Octavio Valencia. This guy was special; he could get stuff done and knew how to bend, I mean really bend, the laws of the land. His daughter was expecting a baby and was having difficulties.

Valencia called me: “Compa Johnson (a Catholic term), can you get your pilot to fly my daughter, nurse, and me to Pachuca? It’s urgent!”

“Sure,” I replied. “Meet us at the strip in an hour.”

During this hour, I had to call Pachuca, call the military, get permits, file a flight plan, and hustle to the strip. Bro. Charles was hurrying to check fuel, mags, and clean the inside of the plane from our last trip. The five of us loaded, taxied to the west end of the strip, and prepared to head into the slight breeze blowing out of the east.

The government had built a military base at the east end of the runway, and there was a ten-foot wall surrounding the base. We now had two thousand soldiers based inside the wall, and there was a real military presence in our area of agrarian conflict. We prayed, and Bro. Charles “lit the fires.”

He would always say, "Well, let's check the tires and light the fires." We were going full throttle eastward when "BANG!" Something happened! There was a violent shaking and we were too near the wall to stop. Bro. Charles whispered, "Hold on!" We lifted over the wall with inches to spare, and as we buzzed the tops of the barracks, I thought, "Man, what a place to fall, right in the middle of all the soldiers in the world." Thankfully, we landed on the strip and shakily taxied to the end of the runway. The local government had given me permission to fence a portion of the runway and park our plane there. I called a taxi and sent the lawyer and his folks in a taxi to Pachuca, about four-and-a-half hours away. Now, what to do with the plane? I called a mechanic who was a member of our church in Mexico City thinking that maybe I could get someone to come work on the plane. No luck. I called the airport in Tampico and talked to the chief mechanic who said, "Bring it to me. I'll fix it." We could fly low; there are no mountains between Huejutla and Tampico. We could get up to about two hundred feet and shake all the way to the airport in Tampico. We prayed a little before leaving, and I prayed a lot as we vibrated all the way to Tampico airport.

We landed, made a deal with the mechanic, exchanged telephone numbers, left the plane, and boarded a bus to ride back to Huejutla. About an hour into that four-hour bus trip, Bro. Charles, who was seated toward the rear of the bus, came up to where I was sitting about mid-way back. He was notably frightened. When he was a little stressed, scared, or excited, he suffered from severe "dry mouth." His mouth was dry and his face was pale.

"Someone picked my pocket and stole my wallet!" He was shaking.

"Are you sure you did not just drop it?" I said.

"Do not know, it's gone!"

I got up, went to his seat, looked around on the floor, and began to ask everyone if they had seen his wallet fall from his pants pocket. I looked into the eyes of each one and could not detect any sign that would lead me to believe that one of them knew anything. Some even seemed sad and concerned. I went to the driver and politely told him what had happened. He asked me to be seated and drove to a toll booth about ten miles ahead. He stopped the bus, got out, and returned with two big, fat, policemen armed with automatic rifles. He shouted, "If you have found this old man's wallet, stand up and bring it to the front of the bus. You will not be held accountable." I thought, "Right...." I had learned four things about Mexican culture: 1. Admit nothing. 2. Deny everything. 3. Demand the truth. 4. Believe none of it.

We continued the trip, and as we were getting off the bus, I thanked the driver for trying. He cussed a blue streak about the thieves that often ride his bus. The next three weeks were horrible for us. We would travel daily back to Tampico, then to Mexico City, then back to Tampico dealing with government officials, getting duplicates of his pilot license, driver license, immigration visa, and credit cards. The five hundred dollar bills, of course, could not be replaced, but all was well and the plane was repaired. It had "blown a jug" in their jargon. It was a four-cylinder Lycoming engine, and one of the pistons had blown. We paid the mechanic, flew back to Huejutla, and Bro. Charles was amazed how everything seemed to work out in spite of difficulties. He, too, knew that when God starts giving, he even lends you the tow sacks. He and his yellow Cherokee Six were with us for four good years. I learned so much from him about Scripture. We would play a game with the Bible. I would read a verse from just anywhere in the Bible, Old Testament or New. He would tell me what the chapter and verse was and then quote the next verse. I never knew another man who knew any more than he from the precious Word of God.

SARA XOCHITL

The twins were five years old when one of the Aztec pastors came to our house beside the church early one Sunday morning. He told me that his wife had delivered their second set of twins, and this made number 12 and 13. The babies were a little boy and a little girl, fraternal twins. He said, "They are really small and the little girl is going to die. My wife told me to come, and maybe Mrs. Martha would take the girl." Girls in that culture are liabilities to the family when small. They are just another body to clothe and another mouth to feed. Boys, however, can learn to work in the fields and help produce for the family. They were going to let the little girl die if Martha did not take her. Each child weighed one kilo, which is a mere two pounds! I briefly mentioned the situation to Martha before Sunday school, but thought nothing about it until after service, about one o'clock in the afternoon. We decided to take one of the members of our church, who was a doctor, with us and go check on the babies. When we arrived, we found the mother lying on the "petate" nursing the little boy. The little girl was lying lifeless on the mud floor about two steps from the mother. She was caked with birth matter and was almost a dark blue, apparently hypothermal. Martha had carried a blanket, and she covered the baby girl as she lifted her from the floor. The baby squealed, and all of us breathed a breath of relief. The doctor, Alberto Canché, examined both babies and decided that both needed an incubator immediately.

The father went with us and I drove very slowly and carefully to the Social Security Hospital, which is the government hospital for common folk. To our dismay, there was only one incubator in the hospital. Both babies fit fine in the one incubator. They were tiny! Both were in the same incubator for six weeks. In that culture, the family of the ill has to feed, bathe, and care for the patients. We took turns every three hours feeding the babies with a syringe through

a little tube inserted through their noses. Graciela was a young lady who lived with us for about eight years, and she was a tremendous help during this time. After six weeks, the little boy could go home. I talked to a doctor friend about operating on the mother. I did not want them to have other babies they did not want, and I sure did not want any more. I drove to the village, brought the parents to the hospital, had the mother see the doctor who did her surgery, and then drove back to the village with Mom, Dad, and baby. The little girl was too weak to leave the incubator.

Martha made a decision that was going to change all our lives. She said, "Buddy, if this baby is going to live, we have to get her out of here." We took her home and began to care for her ourselves. We had no baby bed, no bassinet, nothing. Martha emptied a drawer of her dresser, placed a pillow in it, and lay the baby in the drawer. The parents later told us they wanted us to keep the girl, which we did with joy. We adopted her and could do so legally as Americans because we were now legal residents of Mexico. Sara Xochitl Johnson Lucas was number 001 of legal adoptions in the city of Huejutla. Everybody else just takes a baby and gives it their name, no questions asked. Through the years I joked with Sara telling her that when she cried, I'd kick the drawer shut. Sara was Martha's joy. They were together every waking minute when possible. Martha was the only mother Sara had ever known, even though she has known her birth family all her life. Once again, God lent us some tow sacks.

COLEGIO LINCOLN

For almost twenty years, God had allowed us to become acquainted with literally everyone in our town. If we did not know them personally, they at least knew us, who we were and what we were there for. The town had grown and was now twice as large as it was when we arrived. Many government agencies had moved into town and many, many of its employees had moved from larger cities around the country. Because of our friendship with the leaders of our town, Martha and I were introduced to all the major political dignitaries who came to town. Through the years I shook hands with five of the Presidents of Mexico: Luis Echeverría, José López Portillo, Miguel de la Madrid, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, and Ernesto Zedillo. All the presidents except Echeverría visited Huejutla while we lived there. While in San Luis, I went to a meeting where Echeverría was. John had told me that the way you get stuff done is to ask for it. I wrote a request dedicated to the President requesting the free importation of a van which would be used to help the poor. Somehow I got on a bus that he was on, gave him the letter, and shook his hand as we parted. I never heard from my request. When the President would come to Huejutla, the schools would set up little stands in the plaza where the President would pass so the students could observe. One year, Carlos Salinas came to town and was making the rounds, and he stopped at the stand of the school where Martha taught. Martha had made one of her famous cakes, and it caught the eye of the president! She gave him a piece of cake and he, along with his party, continued their visit to the town's cultural exhibits. In about thirty minutes he returned to Martha's stand and politely asked, "Señora, ¿me permites otra pieza de ese pastel?" (Lady, may I have another piece of your cake?") She gladly gave him a piece and loved to tell the story for many years.

Almost all the people God had brought into our First Baptist Church were of the working class, and many of them were of "indigenous" ancestry. We had worked hard to penetrate the more affluent socio-economic level of our town without much success. However, with the appearance of many more affluent families in town, the need to reach them became a daily burden. Due to the escalating social problems in our area surrounding the agrarian subject, the state and federal governments had sent many agencies into our town to care for these problems. There were 17 of these agencies, and most of the employees were from outside of our area. They were well paid and really struggled finding housing and schooling for their children.

Since our own children were products of the local, deficient education system, and since we had worked hard in many ways to supplement their education, we felt that it was now time to try to begin to help our town with a "bilingual" elementary school. Martha had long dreamt of having a school to help the children of our town begin their education experience with a better structured, more personalized, and less politicized teaching system. She worked hard for three or four years doing all the groundwork for the beginning of the school. We were able to obtain all the necessary permits and paperwork, a process normally taking three years, in only three months. It matters who you know. One of my basketball buddies had become the Director of the State Education System and we were grateful for his help. We purchased land, built the building, and began the school. The National GMA program took our school as their project that year and raised \$17,000.00 for the purchase of the property. I purchased and chartered the land in the name of "Mibamex." Our main attraction was English. We would include English in the curriculum and insure the parents that upon graduation, their children would read, write, and understand English.

So another facet of ministry began, and we were excited with our new "outreach" ministry. The school itself could not be "religious," but we had six years to become acquainted with the parents of children who entered the first grade. In six years we hoped to become friends with the parents. Becoming relational had been a priority since arriving in our town almost twenty years ago. So, after a lot of hard work, prayer, and help from local education leaders, the school started and was the talk of the town. Martha was in her element and loved her "labor of love" in the classroom. She had graduated from college with her teaching degree on a Friday night, and we left for Mexico the next Monday morning back in 1973. Now in 1990, she was finally getting to teach. She had never forgotten that look in the eyes of those little boys selling rats almost twenty years ago. The first year was a great success. Since the building was not complete, we began the classes in our house, which we had built in the area where the school was established. Ugh! Here we go again. Building! All the physical things were my responsibility. The administrative stuff was Martha's. She had to hire teachers, a principal, maintenance, and administrative people. We juggled figures and found that the funds just were not there. The tuition just was not enough to cover the salaries of everyone. We could pay everyone except the principal, whose salary was to be \$300.00 per month. I requested that amount from our Missions office and was thankful for the approval of his funds. So all was set. She decided to begin with four grades and add a grade each year until the six grades were filled. We began with 35 children and four teachers. Martha was pleased and just given to this dream of hers. I helped her in the mornings, but in the evenings at 4:00 o'clock, Brother Catarino and I would leave for another eventful night among the village churches. We were pleased and ready for a brief furlough after the year was over. We tried to relax as we were refreshed visiting churches, meeting friends, sharing our

vision in meetings and over radio interviews, and preparing for year two in the school.

The month of March every year is "Mission Month." The people from First Baptist divide into teams and each night go to a different mission. There are dozens of missions from the First Baptist Mother Church. One night, I had lent the old brown Volkswagen bus to Miguel to carry some folks to one of the missions. As I was arrived from Tampico, after purchasing supplies, the policemen were waiting for me in front of my house. "Don Johnson, there was a wreck in your VW and some of the people are in the hospital. You have to come with us."

In one of the villages, the road leads across a creek, then up a steep hill to the flat area where the village begins. Miguel did not make it up the hill, and the bus with 22 people on board came rushing back down the hill and turned over on its side as it hit the creek. Thankfully none were killed, but several had cuts, bruises, and a couple of little girls had broken arms. Miguel's mother was hurt pretty badly, but not too bad to beat him over the head with her purse. The policemen escorted me to the hospital where the director, who was a good friend and basketball buddy, told them that the injuries were just scratches and there was no need for charges to be filed. Thank the Lord again for the tow sacks.

BIG CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

The summer of 1991 was a great time of reflecting on our past 18 years of service to our Lord. I was so ashamed of my early ignorance, but so grateful for the patience and grace of my Master. I remembered some of the tough times and some of the special times. The lessons I had learned without a teacher had both humbled and strengthened me. One lesson was simple, but profound. In the early years we would use what we called our "film ministry" to draw people to hear the gospel in new villages. I had been given an old 16mm Bell and Howell reel-to-reel projector. I had purchased a few movies, an old yellow Tecumseh generator, and had had a protective box custom built for the projector. To carry all this equipment two or three hours up a mountain was a job. I mean, it was work! I had to ask some of our little men from where we would leave the Jeep to help us pack that stuff up the mountains to the villages where we wanted to evangelize.

One of the first trips was up the mountain to Itzocatl. Two and a half hours straight up! That is, if you did not stop and rest. We had to cross the same arroyo 14 times as we climbed skyward to the village. We would get to the village, eat the wonderful meal they had prepared for us, have a church meeting, and try to sleep somewhere before packing all that stuff back down the mountain tomorrow. Martha would lend me one of her white bed sheets to use as a screen on which to project the movie. I remembered that first trip. There were about ten of us in that little train of huffers and puffers toiling under the burden of our load. The work was worth it as we got to share Christ with more than 400 villagers, many of whom would trust Christ as their Savior. The next day upon returning to the village and loading all the stuff into the Jeep, and as I was nursing my hurting, blistered, swollen feet inside my tightening boots, I grumbled, "I ain't doin' this! I'm getting a horse, a mule, a donkey or something. I'm done with this."

A man named Jose Zavala had a new little filly, and I approached him with my thoughts. He said, "Yeah, I'll sell her to you for \$40.00. But you'll have to break her, she's green." We made the deal, and I got a rope. I roped her, and the friendship started. She was not very wild or mean, just new and skittish. Every spare day I could find, I would drive the two hours up the Atlaltipa and work with my little mare. We became buddies, and I called her Ruby. She was a little bay and had a blaze face and stockings on all four feet. I bought a new Mexican saddle and a bridle and learned to get her ready for our relationship. Jose told me one day, "Look, let's do it my way. We will snug her up to my mule and when you get on her if she starts to buck, I'll pull her head off." I learned that a horse cannot buck very much if another horse is pulling her. So we broke Ruby. I would ride her on the road, and she did really well before we headed up the trail to the village. I planned another trip to Itzcoatl, unloaded all my stuff from the Jeep, and got my horse ready while the little Aztec brothers were loading all the stuff in their "ayates tied to their mecapales" (the materials they used to carry heavy material on their back hanging from their head). I mounted up and off we went. Man, this was the life. No more blisters on my feet, no huffing or puffing, great stuff. Then it hit me. About an hour up the mountain, it hit me.

"Buddy, look at your dumb self. Who do you think you are?" Mounted like some great white god, I noticed the little bare-footed men struggling under the weight of my junk. I repented! "Father, forgive me. I'm a fool." I wept! Trying not to show it, I wiped my eyes, dismounted, tied the generator and projector on to Ruby, and led her the rest of the way to the village. I was so ashamed and so repentant. When we left the next day, I helped carry the stuff down the mountain and felt really good walking with the guys. I gave Ruby, the saddle, bridle and everything to brother Rosas, the pastor of

the church. I never rode another horse in Mexico. I walked the hours and miles where we could not drive. A lesson well learned. After this experience, my little buddies had a different opinion of at least this one white guy. By the way, Bro. Rosas had a huge sugar cane field and made sugar in his mill. He had one mule and a big ole jack donkey. Over the years he raised three good mules from Ruby. So in a strange way, she served her purpose.

BOOTS AND WATER

In many of the trips up and down the mountains, Bro. Catarino and I were alone. I wore cowboy boots for about fifteen years everywhere I went. On one trip to Itzocatl I had just returned from the States and I had bought a brand new pair of Larry Mahan boots. They were not broken in yet and were pretty snug on my feet. There was an arroyo that meandered across the trail fourteen times. When we arrived at the very first crossing, I pulled my boots off along with my socks, rolled my pants legs up above my knees and waded across the creek. On the other side, I sat on a rock, tried to dry my feet, put my socks on, and then forced my new boots onto my damp feet. We walked about half a mile and came to the next crossing. I painstakingly repeated the boot thing and joked with Bro. Cata, who merely slipped his sandals off, waded across and slipped his sandals back on at each crossing. At the third crossing I took the boots and socks off, stuffed them in my "morrall" (the man bag we all carried with our Bible, hymn book, and other belongings) and decided that I would walk barefoot until we crossed the last crossing. It was slow going, but not as slow as the off and on thing with the boots. After number fourteen, I struggled to get my boots on and climb the rest of the way up to the village where the church was awaiting our arrival. I preached that night and was more miserable than I had ever been in my life. I could barely stand to stand. It seemed that service would never end. We sang and sang and sang and sang.

Finally, after everyone had left the building, Bro. Cata and I each placed two benches each together to make our beds. The benches were split logs placed on legs that were limbs from the same tree. The legs were attached to the logs by being pegged from the underside. No two benches were the same height. The discomfort of our bed was not nearly as severe as the discomfort of my aching feet. What a miserable night! The next morning, there was no way my feet would go

inside my new boots. I hurt bad. But there was no remedy for my stupidity. I had to walk barefoot all the way back to the Jeep and found that I could not press the clutch and brake without literally wanting to cry.

In rainy weather, some of the trails were almost impossible to walk on with the boots of choice that I selfishly preferred to wear. Many were the times that I slipped and fell while going up the mountains, and more frequently were the falls going down the mountains. I preached many nights with mud all over my clothes and body. I arrived home at times looking as if I had been dragged along a muddy road. Probably my biggest woe was my knees. I had injured them while playing sports in high school, and in 1984 I had to have complete reconstruction done on my left knee. The Bone and Joint Clinic in Shreveport, Louisiana, did a good job, but I was in a cast for nine weeks and returned to Mexico on crutches with a stiff leg. It took several months to be able to walk without slowing Bro. Cata to a boring walk. My frequent knee problems terminated with both knees being replaced after returning to the States. I think I just wore them completely out doing what I really love to do.

LOSSES

I do not remember very many disappointments! Most of my emotions were gratitude for the grace and provision of our amazing God. However, we still live in a corrupt, sinful world that is filled with people who are very selfish and godless. During the agrarian war, many landowners became frightened, disillusioned, or maybe just tired of the whole situation. Some feared being invaded by the Indians and losing their land to them. There was a choice piece of property about a mile outside of our town, which I thought would be a perfect place for the school, a center for rehabilitation for alcoholics, and possibly a home for unwanted children. There was a three-bedroom house on the property, and a good water well that was 15 meters deep. The owner had been killed in a car wreck, and his widow contacted me about purchasing the property. It was an orchard of grapefruit and black pepper trees, and it was a full ten acres in size. The house was in the center of the property and there was a creek that bordered the south side.

My first task before considering a purchase was to go to the Agrarian Office and see if this property was in danger of being invaded by a nearby Indian land grant. The director of the Land Office knew me and was very gracious. He pretended to search all the documents and plans of the government to enlarge the "ejido" of the adjoining property. He typed up an official document stating that the land was free of any expropriation on part of the Government Agrarian Offices. Martha and I loved the property and our dreams for using it for our Lord grew bigger each day. I finally borrowed money from a Texas bank after a friend put up collateral to help me secure the loan. I paid cash for the property and had the purchase legalized and registered in the names of my three Mexican born sons. My residency papers were still in process.

I hired an old man who was an expert in building rock fences. He worked for two months building a four-foot-tall solid rock fence along the road that passed by the property and went to the Indian village about five miles eastward. The grapefruit harvest would yield about eighty tons of huge pink grapefruit. This would give us some income with which we could help with our boys' college education. We were happy and had great plans for the future.

One afternoon, a pickup full of policemen came to my house and asked me to come with them to the station. I drove my Jeep and followed them downtown. Three land owners of adjoining properties were seated in the Police Station and about twenty men were loading rifles. One of the men said, "Johnson, those _____ Indians have invaded your property and ours. Give us \$200.00 and these boys are going to mow them down." Each of them had forked over two hundred dollars and the police were going to sneak up behind my rock fence and open fire on them. I felt surrounded! I was outnumbered by them and their decision. I said, "Look guys. I'm going to use my land to help these people know the truth about the love of God. If one drop of blood is spilled on my land, I'll never be able to live there nor help any of them." They were bewildered, but being noble men, they told me they understood, took their money back from the police chief, and the struggle began.

Together we hired an agrarian lawyer in Mexico City, and for twenty-three years fought to recover our land. During the twenty-third year, I received a document from the Government stating that the property is legitimately mine. The house on the property is now a federal school, and there are 36 houses and businesses built on "my" property. For ten long years I made a monthly payment to the bank and repaid the loan in full. We never ate one grapefruit from the property. One night about eight o'clock, six young men between the

ages of 18 and 25 came to my house. They knocked on the gate and whistled, calling, "Leoncio!" They could not say Johnson, but Leoncio was pretty close. Many called me this. I joined them in the street and could immediately tell that they were drinking. The leader grunted, "Señor Gringo, we come to tell you to stop fighting for the land. It is our land. It belongs to us and our people. You should never have bought that land. It's ours!" I responded in my sweet, loving way, "What you do not understand is this: God gave me that land and I'm going to use it to honor him and to help you and your people. Thank you for coming, good evening." He said, "Sr. Leoncio, you do not understand! We know where your 'cuatemi' (Nahuatl for twins) go to school, what time they come home, and what time they leave your house. All we are saying is some day they will not arrive home from school." They walked away into the darkness, and my heart sank as I talked awhile to my Master. "Lord, I'm done fighting! If you want me to have the land, I'll use it for you with all my might. You will have to give it to me. I'm done." This all happened in 1982, right in the midst of the Agrarian conflicts in the area.

In 1985, I bought a brand-new Volkswagen Beetle. I got another loan from another bank in Texas with collateral from another friend. Josué and I traveled all over Mexico visiting churches and helping start others. We made trips to Texas and to Central America. I put wide tires, sport rims, a C.B. radio, good stereo, and tape deck in the vehicle. Josué drove some of the time on our long trips, and we both loved my new "bochito." He was married while it was still very new, and I lent it to him for his honeymoon. During the summer of '86, the World Cup for soccer was in Mexico City. Martha and I had planned to go to the States in July and have Christmas in July with all our family members in Texas. We had stayed in Mexico during Christmas. We alternated by staying in

Mexico one year for Christmas and driving to Texas the next Christmas.

We had gone to the huge souvenir market in Mexico City and had purchased gifts for everybody for our Christmas in July. We went to Wednesday night service in the Mesías Church. When services were over, we went out to the street to find no sign of our car! It was gone! I filed a report with the police, borrowed money for bus tickets, and Martha and I rode a bus with no souvenirs to Huejutla. We would look at each other and laugh, then cry, and then laugh again. I paid the note each month for three long years. No insurance, no Volkswagen. We learned what we already knew: all this is just stuff. "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of things he possesses." It sure was fun running the road in that little "bug" though.

DANGERS

I reflected on some of the dangers I had lived through during my time on the field. One night, Bro. Cata and I arrived at Cochisuatitla, where we met in a little mud hut with about twenty people who were listening to me preach. I was amazed at their simplicity! They knew we were coming, and as they planned to prepare benches, they had no idea to put the benches in a row, one in front of the other. They placed the benches around the walls of the one room and had made a simple pulpit which was about waist high to me. I had preached about ten minutes when two men appeared in the door. One came straight to me as the other approached Bro. Cata. The guy who came to me reached into his morral and took out an old, rusty revolver that looked to me like a .38. He pointed it at my face and said in the little Spanish he could speak, "You're coming with me." I quietly closed my Bible, placed it in my "morral", picked up my hat, and followed him out of the building. Behind us came Bro. Cata, with the second guy pointing a gun at his back. My guy took me to the Jeep and said, "You wait here." He perched on a huge boulder beside where the Jeep was parked, which was about three feet from where I was sitting in the Jeep. I could hear all the men of the village whistling, hooting, and shouting in the school where they had escorted Bro. Catarino. In about two hours, he came alone to the Jeep, opened the door, sat down, and said, "Let's go." I have to say that during the entire ordeal, I do not think my heart rate accelerated one little bit. There was a calmness and a peace that I had never felt before in my life. Bro. Cata was cool, too. It was strange! As we bounced down the mountain, we began to discuss the events of the evening.

I asked him, "What did they tell you? What did y'all talk about?"

"Many things," he said. "They forbid us from ever coming back to the village."

“Well, what did you say?”

“I told them that by the same authority they forbid us, I forbid all of them from coming to Huejutla.” They say that as citizens they forbid us, and I said, “Then as a citizen, I forbid all of you. You cannot come to buy nor sell, and if you do you will suffer the consequences.”

“What are the consequences?” I asked.

“Aw, I was arguing with them, they were all drunk,” he said with a grin.

“Well, how did it end?” I questioned. I was still just as calm as a cucumber and was taking my time driving as I had to negotiate the downhill curves.

He said, in that deep serious voice that I heard for so many years, “They said the next time we come will be the last time, and that we will never leave their village again.” I grinned and thought to myself, *Well, no problem, I do not like them anyway.*

Then I asked, “What did you say to that?”

He remarked, “ I told them that whatever they planned to do next time, they might as well do it tonight because Saturday at 6:00 p.m. we are coming back.”

Immediately, my calmness, peace, and tranquility all disappeared. I could hardly hold the steering wheel. Shaking, my back cramping, my legs trembling, I almost shouted, “Are you crazy?” I thought immediately in my mind, *I ain't coming!*

There was silence for about an hour as I drove toward our town. We got home about two o'clock in the morning and had to be at the Aztec Institute at 9:00 the next morning. We had been in Cochisquatitla on Wednesday and were having our Institute on Thursdays and Fridays. When we arrived at the Institute, we sang, prayed, and were preparing for our studies when Bro. Cata decided to tell all the students about our little ordeal the night before. We worked those two days

in the Institute and drove home late Friday evening. I was very restless all night Friday and was dying to tell Martha about the deal last Wednesday. I kept it all to myself. Early Saturday morning I felt horrible. I thanked the Lord and even asked him to make me sicker so I would not have to go back up there. I went down to the street and looked at all the tires on the Jeep, hoping that one or two would be flat. I even thought about driving over a nail or something... anything for an excuse to go tell Cata that, "Hey, we cannot go tonight!" This was one of the longest days of my life, yet time flew. In a few minutes it was 4:00 p.m. and time to go pick Cata up for our trip. We did not talk much as I drove slowly up the winding, bumpy roads. Before leaving, I had held Martha especially tight as I kissed her farewell. Then, not as a last resort, but as a deep desire to be sure, I prayed, "Father, those poor people do not know what they are doing and are mere puppets of the religious gooks who lead them. Could you let us be your witness and your love for them tonight? I love you and trust you and I believe. Please help my unbelief!"

We arrived at 6:00 p.m. sharp. I parked the Jeep beside the huge boulder and we slowly walked to the meeting place. To my surprise, seated on the benches around the walls of the hut were all of our Institute students with their machetes tied about their waists and their Bibles in their laps. We had a great peaceful service! We never had any major problems with the opposition after that night. There is a beautiful rock church building there now where the church meets daily to worship our Mighty God. Bro. Cata reminded me later, "We had to go back that day. Had we not gone back, they would have won and the word would have spread among the villages and we could never begin any other churches in any other village." What a God we serve! He even lends the tow sacks.

In March of every year, I tried to have a week of "Intensive Bible Institute." I would invite a pastor friend from the States to come and teach. I would translate. One of my reasons was to fellowship with them, and this was the time of the year when I really needed refreshing. In 1991 I invited Kirk Shelton to come and teach. Wow, what a blessing. During his stay, Martha asked him to pray about a need we have every year. Since our kids went to public school and their first language is Spanish, we tried to have a young American come each year and teach them English in the afternoon after school. Through the years we had had several super young people who filled this role. These are special people who would give a year of their lives to help a bunch of kids like ours. Some of the ones we had were Patty Carter, Carolyn Barnett, Toni Dooley, John David Aultman, John Hawkins, James Stamper, Karen Keathley, Susan Crum, Kim Hallum, and others. They would teach the English curriculum and relieve Martha from the chore of having to do it. However, we had no one for the next year. Kirk told us that he would pray and look, and with that he returned to Texas. In the early part of that summer, he called us and told us there was a young lady who had just graduated from Baylor University who might be available to work with our kids for a year. He set up a date for us to meet her while in the States for furlough a month or so later.

RAIN AND RIVERS

It rained hard at times, and the flash floods in the mountains were a sight to see. Bro Cata and I had left the Jeep with Bro. Reyes in Atlaltipa and had walked the almost three hours to Mecatlan for an evening service. At about four o'clock in the morning, it began to rain; I mean one of those rains that are spooky. We awoke, got our gear (our morral and books), covered ourselves with our sheet of plastic, and walked rapidly down the trail toward the river in Tlalchihualica. Bro. Cata was a little Aztec with short legs, but he was fast. He could walk me into the ground, and I was pretty good myself. Going uphill, when he was getting out of breath, every time his right foot would touch the ground, he would whistle. Just a short, "tweet, tweet, tweet." This way I knew he was a little "winded," but as we were going downhill in a driving rainstorm, there was only silence! Just the slosh of his feet hitting the wet gravel, mud, and rocks.

We arrived at the river just after daybreak and sat there hoping it would subside. There are always young men who practice their skill of walking in the raging waters when they are about shoulder deep. That morning there were several shouting and hooting as they waded the raging water. Bro. Cata and I were soaking wet by now as we sat on rocks hoping the water would go down and we could wade across. No such luck. But there was a school teacher who was coming from the village of Tlalchi to Huiyatl on our side of the river. We observed that she was expecting a child almost any day, and that she allowed two of the "river passers" to bring her across the river. They made it just fine, hooping and hollering as is their custom. She paid them and went on her way.

Cata and I discussed it very little, and I told him, "I got this, let's go." He whistled and two more came across the river to our side. Two grabbed me, one by each wrist, after I had stripped down to my skivvies. I had my boots in one hand and my morral with my clothes and books in the other

hand. I pulled the chinstrap of my hat tight and led the way into the river. It was apparent that these boys were drinking. Who in their right mind would do this? As we approached the middle of the river, I was aware of a pressure, a force, a power, that I had never felt before. These guys were great. Man, they were stout. We were doing well stepping between the huge rocks on the floor of the riverbed when Boom! A huge round rock like a bowling ball swept all our feet from beneath us. They struggled to get their footing, and I just struggled. The pressure from the water on my hat would not allow me to raise my head above the water, and the boys were about to drown me as they struggled for survival. They finally released me, but the river had me in its stronghold. I tumbled, bounced, and gagged for about 200 yards down river, where in a bend of the river I could stand in the eddy water and get to shore. Every joint in my body was skinned, bruised, and bleeding. My knees were the worst, and my shoulders, elbows, hips, and back were throbbing. Thank the Lord I still had my pants, shirt, and boots (full of water). Wet and cold, but thankful, I began to dress as Bro. Cata came jogging to my side. He hugged me and said, "All I could think about is, 'How am I going to tell Mrs. Martha?'" We made it to Atlaltipa and Mrs. Carmela had the best meal I have ever eaten prepared for us. I preached that night clad in a pair of Reyes' shorts and a blanket draped over my shoulders.

Periodically, other Americans would come into our area scouting it out. One day there were a couple of people who were in a motor home, and they were parked between two rivers near Pochoíca. We spoke to them as we returned from a mission but thought nothing about it. When we got home, Martha said something about having heard on the radio that there was flash flooding in the mountains. I gassed up the Jeep, went to get Cata, and headed back up the mountain to warn the Americans. They would be easily washed away

if they did not leave immediately. Between us and them was another river, the Candelaria. When we crossed it, the water was only hubcap deep on the tires of the Jeep. We hurried to warn the Americans, turned around, and headed home. When we got back to the Candelaria, the water was over six feet deep. We sat in the Jeep for four days and nights. The second day, Bro. Cata walked to a village up the river and got us some cold tortillas to eat. The next day, Martha and Juana drove our pickup to the other side and saw that we were still alive. We talked about that one for a long time.

LOST CHILD

In our church in Huejutla, each Sunday school class would take a special offering for missions each Sunday. Martha's idea was to have matching bowl or baskets in which the offerings from each class were brought to the altar after Sunday school. While Grady and Scott were in San Luis Potosí, we would visit them periodically and go to the huge new market in that beautiful city. We were in the market where Martha was searching for matching baskets, and my job was to keep the twins while she haggled over prices and sizes. Jon and Ben were about three years old, and they were always dressed identically. I enjoyed walking through the streets of towns or down the aisles of markets with one of them holding my index finger on each hand. So it was that we strolled up and down the busy market, she searching for baskets, I following with the boys on my fingers. All was well and we were having a great day away from the business of our church planting stuff. It was a great day until she turned to me and calmly asked, "Where's Jon?" I looked down at my empty finger where Jon had been only seconds ago. I jerked Ben up into my arms and back-tracked through the aisles where we had been shopping. I asked everyone, "Have you seen the other one, he looks just like this one." All of them said the same: "You just passed with both of them," as if to say, "Dummy, don't you remember?"

I ran up and down and around looking and asking. I had left Martha alone with the baskets. In the markets of larger cities, there is an office area, normally on a second floor overlooking the market isles. It is the business section with office furniture and a P.A. System. I asked if I could use the microphone to make an announcement, and immediately I began to shout, "Attention, Attention, everyone look up here. Has anyone seen another little boy who looks just like this one?" I was amazed at all the brown faces who looked at me then looked at each other and shrugged. Nothing! I hurried

downstairs and continued rushing around like a lost man, when a little girl ran up to me and tugged on my shirt tail. "Señor, lo encontraron!" (Mister, they found him). I followed her as we ran, I mean we ran, through the market to a side entrance where there was a lady sitting in her candy stall holding Jon on her knee. Both his jaws were as full of candy as she could stuff in his mouth. He was as happy as could be!

Martha came running, grabbed him, and asked the lady where she had found him. She explained that a policeman had brought him from outside the market and had given him to her. Apparently, a young Mexican lady had taken him, had run outside, and was rushing across the street when she saw the policeman and put him down in the middle of the busy street. The policeman simply picked him up and brought him inside the market, gave him to the large lady, and returned to his post in the street. Jon slept like a baby that night, but Ben was restless and crying from the trauma he had sensed in me as I ran him through the big world looking for his brother. I was ashamed of myself for losing him. I could never have forgiven myself for such negligence. Then I thought about our God. He lost his entire creation and showed his love by giving his Son for dummies like me. I would never give one of my sons for anybody. His love is matchless, and once again, he gave us two sacks.

STROKE

It was a bright, cool spring day and I was in my office preparing to preach when there was a loud knocking on the gate that led to the street. I got up, went to the door, and saw a young boy about ten or twelve years old who was just standing there bewildered.

“Señor Johnson?” he inquired.

“Yeah, what’s up?” I said.

“They want you in the market! You must hurry!”

My Jeep was on the street, so I beckoned the kid into the Jeep and told him to show me where we were going. There were several streets that led to different parts of the market area. All the while I was trying to get the boy to explain to me what was happening and who needed me so urgently. We arrived at a crowded little street that led to the back part of the market and where there was a large group of people gathered as they peered at something, or someone, lying on the ground. I parked the Jeep in the middle of the street and pushed my way through the mass of bodies. I was driven completely out of my senses as I beheld the limp body of Bro. Catarino lying on the ground. I tried to communicate with him, but it was futile. He was alive, but unable to speak.

The ambulance arrived, and the men hustled him away to the hospital. He had experienced a massive stroke! During the following months, I made many trips to Mexico City with him and his wife, trying to get the best medical assistance possible for my friend. During this time I felt that half my strength had been taken from me. Cata had been the backbone of our mission work among the Aztec Indian villages. He had been with me everyday for years and years. We had been threatened, shot at, cursed, and threatened some more. During all these events, Catarino had brokered our position with the villagers and had saved our hides from severe bodily harm. Now he was useless! Now I was useless!

Now things were going to have to change. I tried to dedicate all my energies to help Bro. Cata recover as much as was possible. The following year was very trying for all. I invited other men to go with me to the villages, and somehow by the grace of God we continued the work. In about a year, Cata could walk with the aid of a staff, and he was able to travel to the church houses in the villages. Thankfully, we could drive to most of the village churches by now, and didn't have to walk the miles and hours like we had done in the earlier years. By the grace of our loving God, Bro. Catarino continued to serve in a limited way for many more years. During this horrible time, I was to learn that our Master was preparing me for more difficult days in the future. Some of our best years together were after Bro. Cata had his stroke. He was limited in motor skills and speaking abilities, but his mind and heart were as strong and sharp as ever. His wit never dulled.

EXIT STRATEGY

When I first felt that God had called me to Mexico, I assumed that I would spend my entire life there. In those days, no mission group that I knew of taught their missionaries about leaving their fields. Back in the day, I thought it was a William Carey thing. Go, spend your life doing it, then die. In more recent times, we try to teach our missionaries to formulate a strategy for leaving their country after they have accomplished their goals in their chosen countries. I had just about worked myself out of a job in Huejutla and the surrounding areas. Grady was doing a great job with the missions and was learning everything about the functioning of the school, and I became restless as to my future. I decided to build an office on the second floor of the school with a private stair entrance. I took all the precautions with the security bars and lights. My thought was to change gears a little and try to give the BMA of Mexico some books about the history of Baptists and the BMA in America and Mexico.

I bought a new computer, and some friends gave me a new laser printer. My goal was to spend all the time necessary translating these books into Spanish and printing them for the Mexican leaders. I began with the history of Baptists in the United States and used all the books I could get my hands on to explain how God had used Baptists in the United States, from Roger Williams to the present. I included the 1833 New Hampshire Baptist Doctrinal Statements, the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention, Northern Baptists, GARB, American Baptists, and other Baptist groups. I gathered as much material as I could find and worked for several months on this first book in Spanish. I became really excited with my progress. I thought I had done a pretty good job and wanted to give this overview of Baptists in America to my people. I saved all the work in my new computer and was going to print it soon. However, I got sidetracked with the history of the BMA. Dr. D.N. Jackson's book was a major part of

my translation work, and I spent what time I could getting material from Dr. Gerald Keller and my father, both of whom had vivid memories of the Lakeland, Florida, beginning of the NABA (North American Baptist Association) and the reasons behind its foundation. I completed this work and saved it on my new computer also. Then I began work on the history of the BMA of Mexico. I had lived and worked in Mexico for the majority of the almost fifty years of the BMA of America's work in Mexico. The Mexican pastors who were in the beginning of the BMA of Mexico helped me with the first few years of details. I was pretty proud of myself for the months of hard work I had put into these books and translation works. This was far away from my normal work of walking the hills and starting missions. To sit for hours every day and write and translate was not Buddy Johnson! However, I finished. I often tell people that I have seldom finished anything in my life. I start stuff, teach somebody else to take it over, and I go start something else. But I finished my books! I proofed everything, was getting paper for my laser printer, and was truly excited about the new work I had done. I locked the office, covered the computer and printer, and closed the curtains. I planned to print the first copies Monday morning. After that weekend of visiting missions and preaching, I was excited to teach my English class at 7:00 o'clock Monday morning and hustle up the stairs to my office and print.

As I arrived at the school, I found that my office had been broken into and both my computer and printer, along with other, less important things, had been stolen. My heart was broken, my spirit was wounded, and my temper went wild. I knew the guy in town who was in charge of the ring of thieves, some of whom had stolen from me before. I went to him several times and he returned my stolen tires, car parts, and other items. This time was different. He assured me that

his boys would never touch any of my things and that the ones who had stolen from me were new and didn't know us. I went to the police, the government, the mayor, and the public minister, none of whom could help me. My vision was now blurred and my enthusiasm was lost. Hats off to those who could have started over and finished the work again. I couldn't, and it hurts to tell you that I was either too tired or too mad begin again. Knowing that my church planting work was doing well and that all our leaders were teaching the reproduction that I had spent years teaching, and that Grady could do a better job with the work than I, I began to consider our "exit strategy." It's a strange feeling when you feel that you have finished what you were supposed to do, but now have no idea as to what to do next. I could have continued visiting missions, preaching every night as I had done for years, and no one would have thought anything about it but me! So that is what I did for the next two years or so until the Lord led us back to the great state of Texas to continue learning from him.

ILLNESSES

Other than the Hepatitis and occasional tummy problems, none of us were ever sick. After the twins were born, Martha was not able to continue to feed both of them, and there was no pasteurized milk in our town. We would buy fresh milk from the man with a donkey who passed every morning, boil the milk, let it cool, and drink it ourselves, but the babies became ill and could not tolerate the fresh milk. Ben became so sick that we had to take him to the pediatrician in Tampico who immediately sent him to the hospital. He almost died! As we left the hospital hoping all was well, the doctor told us it was imperative that we get pasteurized milk for the babies or we would lose both of them. For almost the entirety of the next year, I made the trip to Tampico with a small ice chest and bought enough milk in glass quart bottles to last a week, then I would make the three hour drive the next Saturday and the next and the next. The boys did great on the new milk, and we thanked our Lord for lending us the tow sacks once again.

About a year later, we began to notice blood in Jon's stool. It really concerned Martha, and once again we went to the pediatrician in Tampico who examined him and declared that he had a polyp that would hemorrhage every time he used the bathroom. It had to be removed! We were always short on money, and really worried about the costs of the doctor, hospital, and medicines. One of my little sayings for new missionaries is, "If you don't know how to pray, you will learn on the mission field." We prayed and asked our churches to join us in prayer. They all loved our little "white" kids.

On Tuesday nights, we had neighborhood prayer meetings in six different parts of town. Everybody prayed for Jon. We took him to the hospital after spending the night in a motel with both twins. We had to be at the hospital at four in the morning, and we waited in the waiting room as the

doctor took Jon into the operating room. Two hours later, the doctor returned and called me into the hall of the hospital. My heart sank as I looked into his bewildered eyes. He wanted to speak to me alone and out of earshot of Martha. I thought, "He must have died!" Then the doctor put his hand on my shoulder and whispered, "Lo llevaste al brujo, ¿verdad? (You took him to the witch, right?). ¡No tiene nada! ¡Está completamente limpio! (He doesn't have anything and is completely clean!)" More tow sacks. Martha had noticed an excessive amount of blood the day before, and the doctor agreed that it must have broken loose when he last used the restroom. We were thankful as we drove back to Huejutla, and were amazed at the goodness of our Master. In all the remaining years we were in Mexico, other than broken bones, cuts, and bruises, we were never extremely ill. God does lend tow sacks when he chooses.

SUMMER

The summer of 1991 was to be a blur. We always tried to spend the first week with our boys who were in Texas. Grady had lived in Texas for several years and had married Denise Kelly. Upon finishing junior high in Huejutla, he enrolled in high school in Cd. Valles. He lived in Rinconcito in the boys' dormitory. Every morning he would catch a bus, ride almost an hour to Valles, spend his day in school, then catch a bus back to Rinconcito in the late afternoon. Upon graduation, he was accepted into the School of Medicine in San Luis Potosí where John Ladd had studied. Grady completed his third year of Med School and asked me if he could go to Texas and work for the summer to earn enough money with which to buy a better car. I agreed, and that summer turned into ten years. He worked, married, and served at a church in Cut N Shoot, Texas. It was always good to spend time with him when we were on furlough.

Scott graduated from junior high in Huejutla and enrolled in the Tech of Monterrey, located in San Luis Potosí. He lived with Grady in an apartment, and I'm sure they have experiences that only they know about. Scott moved to Texas for his senior year and graduated from high school in Bullard, Texas, where I had purchased a "double-wide" mobile home. We stayed there when on furlough, and Scott and Eric lived there for several years. Scott attended Jacksonville College, but when money was low, he got a job and left school. He would ultimately graduate from Texas A&M with a degree in Mechanical Engineering.

Eric was the first of our kids who got to go to high school in Huejutla. There was a new school begun the year after Scott left home. Upon graduation, Eric moved to Texas where he lived with my sister, Jean, in Conroe, Texas. After graduation, he too attended Jacksonville College. Due to lack of funds, he too dropped out of school, began working with Scott, and lived with him in our "house" in Bullard.

Our twins were now twelve, and Sara was six. We completed the first year of our new school, which Martha had named the Juárez-Lincoln Bilingual Elementary school. We chose that name because both these great men were contemporaries and presidents of their respective countries. But the J-L, for us, also represented our last names, Johnson-Lucas. The government would not allow a "two name school," so we chose the Lincoln name because there were already two Juárez schools in town. We were ready for a good six-week furlough. I would preach in a different church every Sunday, we would work around the house, visit family, and hang out with the kids when we could.

That summer we attended my twenty-fifth high school reunion in Liberty, Texas. It was really good to see all my old classmates again, and some of them told stories to Martha about our high school adventures. None of them were true! The next day, we had a meeting to interview a prospective teacher for our children, so we drove to Waxahachie, Texas, got a room, and on that Saturday morning we were sitting around the pool watching the kids swim. This young lady drove up in a little white Toyota pickup and announced that Bro. Kirk had sent her to talk about teaching our children. Martha made a deal with her. We would pay her \$200.00 per month, give her room and board, and her duties would be to teach the English curriculum in the afternoon to our three kids. We spent the next week at Fairfield Bay, Arkansas, where we had a timeshare.

Every summer we would try to buy clothes for the kids. Martha just always believed the quality was better and the clothes lasted longer if purchased in Texas. We had a Volkswagen van that we had had customized in Mexico City. It had seats built so that there was empty storage underneath and behind the seats. I could store hundreds of pounds of junk in those seats. Every summer it was a battle to find

enough space to “hide” everything we wanted to take back to Mexico for the next year. I had worked hard packing the van, and believe it or not, had it all done the day before we were to return to Huejutla. My neighbor, Dale Melton, had invited me for the past couple of summers to go with him to Longview to the stock car races. Since all my packing work was finished, I accepted, and we drove to Longview. Eric had a date with some girl that night, and Martha had said that she needed to exchange the jackets she had purchased for the twins. Everything was normal that last evening in Texas.

During intermission at the races, I heard, “Buddy Johnson, you have a message at the ticket office. Buddy Johnson!” I looked at Dale and just wondered. Could Eric have had an accident? What could it be? I hurriedly called the number that was jotted on a yellow pad in the window. It was the number for the emergency waiting room in the East Texas Medical Center. Mike Ward, our friend from church, answered the phone and said, “Buddy, you’d better come fast! Martha is having an MRI.”

Dale Melton is a pretty calm guy, but I thought he was a stock car driver as he drove us to the medical center. Martha had taken the twins and Sara to the mall in Tyler to exchange some jackets she had purchased. While paying, she suddenly got a horrible headache. She completed the purchase, hurried to the car, and started for home. Before traveling two blocks, she pulled the car over to a convenience store and asked the twins to call their friend’s father, Mike Ward, to come help her. Mike hurriedly came to where they were and rushed her to the hospital. My neighbor and I hurried to his vehicle, turned on his flashers, and sped to the hospital. My thoughts ran wild as we flew toward the ER. Upon arriving, the doctor came out with some X-rays of a terrible brain hemorrhage in the subarachnoid area of Martha’s brain. I had to see her! I pressed the doctor to allow me to go into

the prohibited area where she was lying. I sat beside her that night as she slipped in and out of consciousness. The morphine made her vomit, and the pain seemed to become more intense with each episode. All I knew to do was pray as I wept and wondered. We spent the night praying and trying to understand what was happening. At some wee hour of the next morning, something strange happened to both of us. There was a sudden relief from her pain, and a sweet, peaceful, calmness settled in our room. We both agreed that all was well. Live or die, it's okay. Sweet, sweet, peace. Everything was going to be fine. There would be details, adjustments, whatever, but the peace was amazing. Only people who have been there truly understand this amazing peace. The calmness was refreshing, and the serenity was just unfamiliar to me.

The foreign matter outside the vascular system in her brain was causing horrible spasms which would paralyze different parts of her body at different times. At times it would be half her entire body, at other times one specific area. The spasms would have to lessen in intensity before surgery was an option. There was only one surgeon who would attempt such a delicate operation. Three weeks later, on September 5, 1991, she came out of surgery smiling and thanking the hundreds of people who had come to the hospital and sat during the 5-hour surgery. We all sang, prayed, and thanked our Lord for his goodness. He lends you tow sacks.

Everyone left, the kids returned to school, the twins went with my sister Jane, and Sara went with the Lucases. I was all of a sudden alone in the waiting room of ICU when, at 3:45 in the morning, a little Filipino nurse hurried to my side and asked me to come with her. Martha was very troubled and had to be restrained to keep from injuring herself. The spasms were now more intense, and they affected her body in other ways. As I prayed, she seemed to calm down and as

soon as I said, "Amen," the horror would begin again.

Doctors came, and soon told me that there was no brain activity. Twelve hours later, they ran another test to be sure. My sweet friends and family rushed back to the hospital, prayed with us, and began to console us as our frustration and pain began to settle in. I remembered that sweet peace. Where was it now? But I had to seek it, and seek it now. It was not to be found. My fear was that my flesh, which has always betrayed me, would do it again in the presence of my children. I said, "Father, you have shown me what very few eyes have ever seen. Now please show me that strength that I have never had for these days." He did—more tow sacks. I well remember all who came back to the hospital that day. I also well remember the peace our God gave us. I talked to each of the boys and with Sara. My worse pain was observing the pain I saw in them. Sara was only six years old, and on each furlough would spend hours going to the malls with Martha and shopping. Not buying, just looking. I told her, "Sarita, your Mom has gone to heaven to live with Jesus." Bewildered, she looked at me and asked, "Papa, where is she going to shop in heaven?" I took her home with me that night, and only she and I were together. She slept in my bed as I simply lay there, prayed, cried, and tried to think of what I should do the next day, then the next, and the next.

TAFFY

Only three weeks prior to Martha's becoming ill, we had spent the day with the young lady who was to be our tutor for the year. Taffy Ann Bell was born in Waxahachie, Texas. She had grown up in the Farley Street Baptist Church where her father was deacon and her mother the organist for the church. She was a recent graduate of Baylor University, and had been the salutatorian of her high school graduating class. She had accepted Martha's invitation to tutor our children for the next year, and she was to return with us to Mexico in the month of August. Upon Martha's illness, Taffy went to Mexico to live with the Ladds until our return, thinking that Martha would recover and be able to return with us to Mexico. The second time I met Taffy was at Martha's funeral. The Ladds and Taffy had come from Mexico to Texas for the funeral, and Taffy attended the funeral with her parents.

I well remember our brief conversation at the grave site that day, the 10th of September, 1991. This was only two days before what would have been our 27th wedding anniversary. I told Taffy, "I really do not know when or if we will be returning to Mexico. I have so many bills and paperwork pending that it will be a while before I will know what our plans are." During the three weeks that we spent in the hospital in Tyler, Texas, awaiting God's will for Martha, I had placed our twins in the North Park Baptist School where my sister, Jane, was the director. I had sent Sara with Martha's parents, and she had entered the first grade in Burleson, Texas. Taffy's response to my statement was: "Bro. Buddy, when God spoke to my heart about teaching your children this year, He knew Mrs. Martha would not be here. My commitment for this year is to teach your children, and when you return to Mexico, I will be ready to begin." Our twins were 12, and our adopted daughter, Sara, was six years old. Our three older sons were in the United States

working and attending college. Reality became a horror for me during this life-changing event. On September 12, our anniversary, I chose to sit at home alone and read the cards and get well letters that had been coming for the past three weeks. There were hundreds and hundreds of them. I would read, cry, cuss, pace, read, and wonder.

What would I do? Hundreds of people sent love and prayers through their cards and letters. Many of them reminded me of Romans 10:28. I tried to believe it. I found it hard to pray, read the Bible, or think. I tried to call and talk to the kids every day, but I did not know what to say to them. I realized that I was becoming angry with God. He could have prevented all this. I had not considered death as an option. Not once had the thought entered my mind that she would die. We had seen people come into the hospital, have brain surgery, get up, and walk out of the hospital. But now, what would I do? The brain is a strange animal. In the wee hours of one morning I had selfish, suicidal thoughts. They were so real and so tempting. I came to myself, got out of bed, unloaded all my guns, put them in the car, and drove to my parents' house. I asked Dad to keep them for me. I was so ashamed and asked God to forgive me, restore me, and tell me what I was to do. Six weeks later, I picked up all three of the kids and headed for Huejutla. Upon our return, I found the town in mourning for Mrs. Martha. Some Catholic friends had even paid to have the priest, who hated us, say Mass for her. I thought it wise to have a memorial service in our church for her, and my how the town came and wept as I shared the story, showed slides, and preached about Jesus.

The reality of a brand-new school with financial responsibilities for all the teachers and workers was a nightmare for me. Martha had done all the planning, hiring, and paying. Now, I had to assume those responsibilities in addition to all my church planting and missionary duties.

During the following year, God's grace became especially sufficient, and the government asked us to change the name of the school from "Colegio Lincoln," to the "Martha Johnson Bilingual Elementary School," which we gladly did. During that year, Taffy assumed the leading English teaching role in the school and took over all the administrative duties which freed me from a ton of burdens. I was glad to pay her \$200.00 to do all she was doing. When we enrolled Sara in her mother's school, she was in the first grade. The school prospered, and the children struggled through that school year and the year of English classes with Taffy.

Taffy spent the mornings in our school teaching English, attending to disciplinary problems, and dealing with parents. She wrote a beautiful "school song" which set a precedent for all the elementary schools in town. She saved the school! Then, in the afternoons, she would spend hours with Sara and the twins teaching them English, American history, and other courses. In March of the next year, I came in from the dentist and was sitting on the couch as Taffy worked with all three kids at the dining table. They were all dying laughing. I mean, they were belly rolling as they laughed to tears. Taffy was just screaming along with them as they laughed. This was the first time I had seen them laugh since their mother had passed away. I thought, "Lord, could it be? Could it be that you sent her here for us?" I dismissed that thought and slid back into the moaning from my tooth pain. Later that year I mentioned this event to her and she began to weep and said, "Brother Buddy, I have known for two months that God brought me here for y'all."

As we discussed marriage, I told her that it would be very hard to walk in Martha's shadow. Again she said, "Oh, Brother Buddy, it will be an honor to walk in Mrs. Martha's shadow." What she did not know was that every woman who had come to Christ had been led by Martha. She had held

their crying babies, sat with them during childbirth, disciplined them as they grew in faith, and had loved them with the love of Christ.

I had brought Sara to a ladies' conference in Arlington that year, and from there I drove to Waxahachie to discuss our plans with Taffy's parents. Her mother was so gracious and said, "Brother Buddy, I feel that this is what we raised Taffy for. May God bless you." Her Dad, on the other hand, remarked, "Well, she's a grown woman and can do whatever she wants to, but I'm not for it." We said our farewells, and Sara and I returned to Huejutla. I told Taffy about her Dad's statement, and she said, "That's it then. We will just forget everything until God changes his heart." It was Sunday morning about 7 o'clock when he called and expressed to me that both he and Taffy's mother were in agreement and gave us their blessing if we still wanted to get married.

Now, it became time to hire teachers for the next year. We had clauses in the contracts of "high moral standards." Though some of the teachers were not believers, all the administrative people were members of the church. We had a great group of teachers who were loyal to the "Martha school" more than to me. At one point in time, one of the teachers broke the rules. He had gone across the state line where there was a brothel. Being drunk, he got into a fight with one of the girls. In anger she jumped in his car and sped into town. He chased her in a taxi, caught her, jerked her out of the car and literally beat her up in the street. Well, everybody in town knew about it. I called him into my house, sat down with him, and reviewed the moral clause of his contract. I did not fire him, I just did not hire him for the ensuing school term. In about a week, two policemen appeared at the school and presented me with a lawsuit. He was suing the school for ten thousand dollars. Where would I get ten thousand dollars? Our principal was a lady who had

known Martha and loved Taffy. We hired her to work with us in the mornings, as she had another teaching job in a Federal School in the afternoons. Mrs. Xochitl Austria de Fayad took a deep breath and told me, "Well, we will counter sue." I knew nothing about legal matters, but her husband was a lawyer and he recommended a friend of his in Pachuca, the state capital. I drove to Pachuca, hired the lawyer, and during the next six months made several trips before the trial. The trial consisted with the two of us and our lawyers going before a judge and with no jury. The judge would decide the case. His decision was in favor of the teacher, and my payment to him was a whopping \$300. In this case, God did lend me some tow sacks.

Those were tough days. I was not at ease in the villages because I was worrying about my kids. I could not stay with my kids for worrying about the love of my life, which was being in the villages. I hired a young lady, Mari, to stay with Sara, prepare her for school, dress her, and cook for us. I invited two young men to stay with us and help care for the twins while I was away. Nothing worked! I was more miserable with every passing day. I would get in from the villages after midnight every night, go to bed, and about 4:00 a.m. wake up in my empty bed, alone. It became evident to me that loneliness was my worse enemy. My anger with God seemed to grow instead of subsiding. I would get up, brew coffee, open the Bible, and try to hear from God. Nothing! He was silent! He knew I was in no condition to hear him. My pride and selfishness had to be broken before I could hear him. I was useless during those days. I was such a hypocrite! In the quietness of my loneliness, I was such a faithless loser. I would bathe, shave, dress, and go into the city to meet the people who loved me. They would hug me, cry for me, pray for me, and offer to buy my lunch or dinner. The unbelievers would invite me to the cantina with them, and even offer me

drink in the street. The entire town was suffering with me. I saw the grace of my Lord everywhere I went. Little by little, I could hear him again as I read his Word. Things would be better; he would lend more tow sacks.

Taffy would learn some very hard lessons after our marriage. The following year we were married in her home church in Waxahachie on July 11, 1992. We were married by Lynn Stephens, Josué, and Alan Rogers, who had been Taffy's youth leader. We drove to Texarkana for our honeymoon at the Kings Inn on the Arkansas side. The next morning, I preached at Hillcrest Baptist Church. You should have seen the looks from some of the older saints of God! That afternoon, we drove to Fairfield Bay where we were met by all our family. Grady and Denise had their first baby, Alan. There were ten of us in that one condominium for the entire week. I wanted all of them to get to know Taffy, and I wanted her to get to know all of them. We had an unforgettable week! Upon our return, family adjustments became priority as we continued our work among the churches and she with the school. Every lady in town hated Taffy. No one would speak to her. She had invaded a place that she had not earned, in their opinion. Some of the people from church came to question the wisdom of my bringing her into our family. The twins were bitter. They were mad at me, God, and the world. They had their black belt in Tae Kwon Do, and every day they would take their frustrations out on some poor classmate. Taffy would go to their rescue from school detention and suspension. Only ladies go to school to take care of their kids' disciplinary problems. One day she came home and said, "Brother Buddy, we have to do something about these twins. We're going to lose them if we don't do something." What were our options? There were no other schools in town. We sure were not going to send them to the Catholic school.

The twins had to be at school at 5:00 a.m. for their punishment. They painted the walls around the school, they swept the street in front of the school, and the next day they were in trouble again. Taffy said, "I'll homeschool them." I said, "You are crazy! They will run you nuts!" It was not easy, but she taught them for three years, and they graduated from Summit Christian Academy. Words fail me to explain the trials during those years. God's grace became evident every day. Our daughter graduated from her mother's school, and she went to junior high while Taffy homeschooled the twins through three years of high school. When Sara graduated from that junior high school, we had had a child in that school for seventeen years. How many lives had we touched, in one way or another? Believe me, there were adjustments and adaptations that were daily in our house, work, and ministry.

After the twins' graduation, they went to the United States to attend college while the three of us—Sara, Taffy, and I—continued with the ministry and school. It was about this time that I began to notice that Martha's shadow was waning and Taffy's shadow was growing. People were beginning to trust her. They would come to her for counsel, and they loved her work with the ladies at church and for her musical abilities at the piano. Then God blessed us in a new way.

About three years after the passing of Martha, we were truly blessed as our oldest son, Grady, came to work with us in Mexico. For the next five years, I rejoiced as never before, because for the first time in the many years we had been planting churches, I had a companion worker. Who has the opportunity to work with his own son in ministry on the mission field and watch his own grandchildren be born and grow up? They lived right across the street from us. God lends tow sacks. We were blessed. I loved working with Grady and teaching him the things God had taught me about church planting and church multiplication.

We worked together for five good years when it was beginning to become evident to me that my time in Mexico was going to end. I became aware that I had finished the work that God had brought me to Mexico to complete. I had taught the things that I had learned from God to the faithful men who were now faithful to teach others, and the work was doing well. New churches were springing up all over our area, and new leaders were growing as they learned from others. Wow! What a joy just to see what God had done and how he had blessed me beyond measure by allowing me to observe all that he had done and was doing in the lives of our people. I faced a dilemma for the first time in many years: I had had no other vision than that of planting churches in our area. We had trained all the pastors in all the churches and missions, and God was just doing what he does: blessing the preaching of his Word. Now that I had turned all the work over to the men I had trained, I had no exit strategy! Where was I to go? What was I to do? I could have stayed and continued to help the churches, teach the men, and even begin other churches. However, there were dozens of men doing all the work, and now Grady was doing my job better than I.

I prayed for a new vision. This was new for me. I had had the same vision for almost thirty years, and now I asked for another? Wow! Bro. Craig Branham was interim pastor at the church in Texas where I had formerly pastored, and he asked if I would consider returning to pastor. I struggled with the pros and cons, and finally felt that this was God's answer for my dilemma. We returned to the states where God was going to give me his vision while pastoring for a little more than three years. One of the blessing of pastoring was the chance to meet the Lord every morning in an office and spend three or four hours a day studying the Word of God. I had not studied consistently and daily in years. During this

time, I was permitted to complete my Master's Degree in Seminary and learn, once again, how to live as an American.

My attending Seminary is another story. Upon moving to Mexico in 1973, I lacked only a few hours of Seminary study to complete my work in the Master's program. During the years, I received a few courses by correspondence, and I really planned to someday complete the work. As one often does, I became submerged in the church planting ministry and the task of becoming acquainted new people in many, many villages required all my time. As I finalized my work in Mexico and began to plan our return to the States, I contacted the BMA Seminary and asked about the possibilities of finishing my degree work. I was heartbroken to find that there was a limit of seven years during which time a student had to finish his degree work, and in special cases, there was a ten-year limit. I had not done any work in the Seminary for twenty-seven years!

I again contacted Dr. Charley Holmes, president of the BMA Seminary, and begged for some kind of relief. He promised to look into it. I had little hope. Before long, he called and told me that he had contacted the accreditation agency and if the faculty and trustees were in agreement to place an amendment in the school's constitution, perhaps I could continue my degree work. The "Buddy Johnson" clause in the bylaws of the BMA Seminary states something like this, "Any student of the BMA Seminary who interrupts his studies to become an employee of the BMA and is unable to continue his studies, may return when possible and complete the degree work." Wow! I was permitted to finish my work and graduated with my Master of Arts in Religion with a smile on my face and thanks in my heart to God and to the men who serve in our Seminary. He even lends you tow sacks.

I rejoiced as I looked back over the years and remembered that there were no churches in the area when we arrived, yet during our time there, 53 missions had been begun. Indeed, many were now reproducing churches. God had allowed my eyes to behold what few men's eyes have ever witnessed: the beginning of a church planting movement that literally changed the culture of an entire area of the world. Some of these churches did not survive, and others have been carried away to other groups by men who were never truly part of our fellowship. Yet, many of those churches continue to exist and multiply today, almost 45 years after they began.

NEW DIRECTION

It was during this time that our daughter Sara became an American citizen and Taffy adopted her, becoming her new mother. We learned a lot during this time in the pastorate. It was on September 11, 2001, when the Twin Towers in New York City were toppled by terrorists. Some of our lessons were simple, and others were hard. The simple ones dealt with our loving and caring for people. The same constants are in ministry all over the world regardless of customs or languages. People still need a Savior. Hurting people still need love and attention. Dying people still need hope. I continued doing what I had always done, with one exception. I was not beginning any new churches! Wow. We were just learning to do it in English in our new setting. The hard issues dealt with our habit of starting new churches and working in the multiplication mindset. We became shockingly aware that very few churches in the States were starting new churches. In fact, it seemed a little foreign to some that the local church should plant a daughter church. We had forgotten that years back, another church had become the mother of our church, and our church was the daughter who would grow into a mother--or would we? It seemed that everywhere I traveled inside Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and other Southern states that the only people I saw were Hispanics. It was shocking to learn that more than fifty million of these folks live in our country. Fifty-plus million Hispanics live in the United States! Fifty-plus million speak Spanish inside our borders! This began to weigh on me, and I wondered what the Lord was up to.

My good friend, Thomas Monroe, who had visited me multiple times during fifteen years, came to visit. He made me aware of a group of Hispanics in his town that he had become acquainted with. He asked if I would go with him to visit them and discuss the possibility of starting a small group Bible Study with them. My heart fluttered for the first

time in years. During the next year, we began the church, purchased a vacant church building, lent money from the church I was pastoring, and my church became the “mother church” of our first Hispanic daughter. I was content but also troubled at the lack of focus among my American brethren toward the Hispanic community. Many of them spoke with me as to what they could do to reach some of the Hispanics around their churches. My heart continued to stir, but I had no direction as to what I could do to help them. It was during this time that I was invited to preach a tent revival meeting in a Hispanic church in northeast Texas. For the first time in a couple of years, I felt that I was in my element among “my” people. During that week, God spoke to me through a conversation that I had with the pastor of the English church that was sponsoring the Hispanic ministry. Pastor Tommy Oglesby posed the question, “Buddy, why don’t you help churches do what we are trying to do...start Hispanic ministries?” My response was silence. I had thought about doing something like that but had no idea as to the will of God for my life. The next morning, very early, I awoke with a start! “Do something to help the Hispanics around you” seemed to be the shout to my mind and heart.

I went to my office at the church and began to pray and seek some semblance of direction from the Lord. Within two or three hours I had scribbled an acrostic on a messy sheet of paper; “FLECHA” it was. My thought was, we know what our target is, but what projectile will we use to hit the bull’s eye? “Flecha” is the Spanish word for arrow, and the acronym was born out of the same need I had struggled with in Mexico many years before: I knew what the target was, but I was searching for the projectile with which to hit it. “Arrow” it would be. It is the same problem the early church had. It is the same prayer Jesus taught his followers to pray. There was a shortage of laborers! Our prayer must

be for the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers! In the United States, where are the Hispanic laborers? How can we start Hispanic churches without Hispanic laborers? All these questions were bouncing around from my heart to my mind. Thus, I developed the acronym "FLECHA," which means, "Forming Leaders by Evangelizing Contacts in Hispanic Areas."

This is pretty much the same thing that led me to Mexico and drove me for all those years. I felt relieved from the burden of not having a plan, because on my messy sheet of paper, I had a goal! It soon became apparent that though it sounded good, it was foolish. I had no one to help me "form leaders." And, by the way, where was I to get leaders anyway? Then it dawned on me: the American churches! Each English speaking church in the BMA can begin a Hispanic ministry. I began to think, "If we do it right, the church of tomorrow must be bi-cultural, bi-lingual, or multi-cultural. The first church was like that. There were sixteen or seventeen different language groups in the church at Jerusalem. Why are most of our churches in the States monolingual, while we are surrounded with dozens of languages from people from around the world? I was invited to attend different conferences on "Multi-Cultural Church Planting," and was introduced to several ideas which, until then, were not in my way of thinking.

My son Eric had married Kelly Brockway, and they were serving in a church in Tyler, Texas. He called me one night and told me that God had called him into the ministry, and that he was willing to serve wherever God led him. Ben married Crystal and was active in First Baptist Jacksonville. A few months passed and our church in Texarkana called Eric as my associate pastor. Once again, I was working in ministry with one of my own sons. A man can have no greater joy than to "know that his children walk in the truth."

We had a ball working together, living near each other, and learning how to do this thing that God desired in his church. When I entered the Hispanic Coordinator's position, the church called Eric to be their pastor, and I was thrilled to get out of the pastorate and get back to "starting" stuff. I have never been very good at finishing things, but I have loved starting things everywhere I have ever worked. My joy has been to start it, grow it, and train someone to take it and continue with it. I love to leave it, go somewhere else, and start something new. I suppose I fit somewhere in the scheme of: "some plant, some water, but God gives the increase!" He lends you the tow sacks.

Taffy and I worked hard for the next seven years in the Coordinator position with Hispanics. We worked in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Colorado, New Mexico, and California, and helped American churches begin 17 Hispanic ministries in their churches. In some cases, English churches merged with Spanish-speaking churches. Other churches adopted "daughter" Hispanic churches. We loved working with Hispanics inside our country. Our greatest asset was having lived in the Hispanic culture, I for almost thirty years, and Taffy for almost ten years. Knowing where these people came from and understanding their plight was a great asset for us.

I saw the need to try to get the leaders of all our Hispanic ministries together for a time of worship and fellowship. The thought came to me as I remembered the joy we had had in Mexico with all our pastors and workers when we got together for a time of prayer, study, and fellowship. I contacted Bro. James Speer at our national encampment grounds in Gary, Texas, and set up a time for us to meet. I contacted all the Hispanic pastors I knew of and invited them for a two-day "Hispanic Men's Meeting," which I named "HOMBRE A HOMBRE" (MAN TO MAN). I invited a couple of foreign

Spanish speaking preachers, and I prayed that God would use this meeting to refresh the Hispanic leaders and call new men into ministry. Bro. Josué Osorio from Mexico and Bro. Freddy Didier from Puerto Rico were the preachers in the first Hombre A Hombre. We had an attendance of 228 men from eight states. Many of these men dedicated their lives to serve our Lord. Some surrendered to return to their homeland and start new churches. God lends the tow sacks.

**METHODS
OF
HISPANIC MINISTRY**

In one of the conferences I attended on church planting, the idea of technology was introduced. The propositions that were introduced were these: 1. Bilingual interpreters are easier to find than Spanish speaking preachers. 2. With ear pods, an interpreter, and little investment, people of other languages could hear the pastor's sermon in their own language. 3. Why place your "ethnic people" out in the gym when they can worship with the church? 4. It is easier for a church to begin a Hispanic ministry than plant a Hispanic church. Wow! This all made a lot of sense to me.

As I struggled with a way to publicize my thought to the churches of the BMA, I approached our Missions Director, Bro. Grady Higgs. Bro. Higgs was quick to see the simplicity of the idea of "forming leaders" through our existing churches. Soon I was named Coordinator of Hispanic Church Planting, but I had no idea of what I was going to do in this area. What I did know was that ministry takes work. Taffy and I decided to try to learn how to begin Hispanic ministries ourselves before trying to teach others to do so. We purchased a motor home and began to travel to churches that had a desire to begin a Hispanic ministry. Our plan was to live near the church building, work with the church, and fill the English church with Hispanic people. There were several things that needed to happen before this could become a reality: 1) The church must desire this ministry. 2) There must be large numbers of Hispanics in the area. 3) Our goal must always be the same: form a leader, leave him in charge, then go to another town and begin again to do the same.

To our joy, we found that this process worked! For the next few years, we traveled from state to state, staying from 6 to 10 months in each church. We would meet Hispanics at Wal-Mart on Friday and Saturday and make acquaintances. We had learned to be "relational" many years ago. It was not difficult to find a home of one of the Hispanics where we

would invite ourselves to have a Bible study. Thus, our small groups became our weekly meeting place, and soon these people would come to church where we would interpret the message of the pastor and teach one of our bilingual leaders to do the same. Soon, the leader was doing the task of interpreting and leading the home small group study. Some of our groups reached 40 or more in number. In one church, we had people from 10 different countries attending our Hispanic ministry. "FLECHA" was working, and other churches were waiting. Each place and every face has its own story. The joys and the heartaches were the same with the Hispanics in the United States as they were in planting churches in Mexico.

Our very first Hispanic ministry in an English-speaking church was in Jacksonville, Texas. The church was without a pastor when one of the deacons called and expressed the need for someone to try to reach the many Hispanics who lived in Jacksonville. I met with the deacons, interested people of the church, and other church leaders, and we decided to move to Jacksonville and begin working with Hispanics. We parked near the Jacksonville Baptist College campus on the property of the old Travis Street Baptist Church building. Some of the college students were interested in what we were doing and joined us as we began to knock doors and invite Hispanics to our very first Bible study, which was to be held in the Travis Street Church Building. We had fun! Within a few weeks we had more than 30 adults in our Bible study group. By this time, the First Baptist Church had called a pastor, and he approached me with this idea: "If we are sponsoring the Hispanic ministry, why not bring them to our facility and integrate them into our church?" This had been our plan all along, and soon we were meeting for Sunday school at First Baptist and were worshipping with the ear pods and an interpreter.

In the transition, we lost about half our people. Some of them were not comfortable meeting with the "Americans." This is a pretty common problem. Many of the Hispanics want to meet only with Hispanics. They are more comfortable with their own Spanish-speaking community. Here is the problem: their children, in many cases, speak more English than Spanish. The reality is that after one generation of Spanish ministry, all the young people will either drop out of church all together or integrate into the English church. There are differences of opinion in this area, but I am convinced that the Hispanics work with English speaking people and they learn to read the traffic signs, and billboards. They all want to learn English so their English-speaking brothers in our churches can love them. Even though we lost some people, we had a great ministry, and many Hispanics were baptized into the fellowship of First Baptist. We continued our small groups in the homes of different Hispanic believers, and the ministry became a joy for us and for the church.

When I became Coordinator of Hispanic Church Planting in the U.S., I worked under Dr. Kevin Clayton who was the Director of National Missions for the BMA of America. He told me that it would be beneficial if I attended a church planting workshop in California called "Dynamic Church Planting International." I asked him if the material was in Spanish; he checked and found that it was not. A couple of years later, it had been translated into Spanish, and there was a workshop in Rockwall, Texas. Taffy and I were beginning the Hispanic ministry in Palmer, Texas, and it was near enough for me to drive each morning for a week, receive the training, and become certified to teach the material, all in Spanish. I was flabbergasted! These men had compiled all the stuff I had staggered and stumbled over for thirty years, packaged it, and made it reproducible and teachable in a three-day course. Wow! I could not believe it. I immediately

began to share the information with Hispanic groups all over the South, then into Mexico, Central America, and South America. I became a Master Trainer and could certify qualified men to teach this material to others. II Timothy 2:2 was still God's plan for teaching church planting. God just continued to lend us tow sacks.

In an annual summit meeting of the worldwide DCPI leaders, I was made a Senior Master Trainer and given the authority to appoint Master Trainers who can certify others who can teach others. Last year, 25,000 men and women were trained to plant churches around the world. Just a few over 400 of these were mine. I think very often that God blesses four things more than he blesses anything else: W-O-R-K. It has been my joy to teach these methods of church planting to almost all our missionaries and in many of the countries where they work. I have led trainings outside of Latin America in India, Ghana, Tanzania, Thailand, Vietnam, and Bangladesh, and I have plans to continue in other countries where our Lord leads us. He continues to lend us tow sacks. Several years ago I was named Coordinator of International Church Planter Training for the BMA, and continue to try to teach what I have learned to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. I believe with all my heart that Jesus gets his glory through his church, as seen in Ephesians 3:21. So it stands to reason, the more churches we have, the more glory for our Master.

MODELS

There are several models for starting new churches: a. The Multicultural Model, b. The Mother Church Model, c. the Sharing Model, d. The Missionary Model, e. The Adoption Model, and f. The Accidental Parenthood Model. I want to discuss the model I know most about, then share a little that I have learned from the other models. Any missionary who "parachute drops" into an un-evangelized area of the world will probably use what we call the Missionary Model. This is more or less the model I stumbled over for the many years I planted churches in Mexico. These men arrive in an area of the world and begin a church planting movement from absolutely nothing. There are no believers in that area, no Bibles, and no churches. Their goal is to begin with an effort to become related or associated with the people in the chosen area, and truly befriend as many people as is physically possible. He or she may use various methods such as small group family meetings or cell meetings. In reality they must "become all things to all men so that by all means, they might win some." I learned the hard way that it is easier to win a man to Christ after you have won his friendship. If he does not trust you, why should he trust your Christ? This model was championed by the "Master of Missions," our Lord Jesus Christ. Others like William Carey, Hudson Taylor and hundreds of others have followed this model. In the Hispanic communities where I have been working since returning to the States, this model is appropriate and successful. Where there is a Hispanic church planter, he will be mentored by a local mother church and will maintain a close relationship with this parent church. They will work together as the Hispanic church is begun by the missionary through home evangelism, disciple training, and Bible studies.

Here is the problem! Many American churches where only English is spoken have a true desire to begin a ministry among Hispanics who live around their church facilities.

They find a bilingual guy who says he is a preacher and even presents documents and letters of recommendation. He convinces the pastor that God has led him to work hand-in-hand with that church and with that pastor. They hire him, give him access to their facilities, and even pay him without having a clue about where he came from, what he believes, what he has done before arriving, or what his plans are. A lot of our Baptist churches are promoting a full-blown charismatic Hispanic ministry, whose doctrines are far from biblical, without knowing what is going on out in the gym on Sunday mornings. Think about it. This is a great, biblical model when and if you have a good man in whom you confide, trust, and support. "Can two work together except they be in agreement?" Amos 3:3. This person should be directly responsible to some of the appointed church leaders, such as, deacons, elders, pastor, mission director and others.

A model or pattern tells us what the ingredients are. A model tells us what the finished product should look like. People who cook use recipes. Those who sew, use patterns. Builders use blueprints. Churches should have some idea of a model they will use in order to plant new churches that plant other churches. The basic problem is this: there are not enough Hispanic leaders to minister to the millions of Hispanics in our country. The simple solution is for the American churches to choose a plan (model). Here are some ideas:

A. The Multicultural Model: Becoming a multicultural church is not necessarily planting a new church. But this often forms a "seed bed" for the planting of ethnic churches. Some churches do, as I have mentioned, use technology, headphones, and when translators are available, translate simultaneously the sermon from the senior pastor to the church on Sunday morning. It is easier to find a good interpreter than it is to find a good Hispanic preacher. Some

larger churches have several languages being interpreted at the same time on Sunday morning.

B. The Mother Church Model: In this model, the church decides to begin a new Hispanic or ethnic church from a nucleus which was formed within its own membership. This might be done from an ethnic Sunday school class, from a prayer or Bible study group, or beginning an extension service where there are many people of a certain language group. A Spanish-speaking leader will have a better chance of impacting an area than a non-Spanish speaker. The church names an evangelistic team, sends them to work an area, secures a meeting place, prays, and begins. The church might have a "baby shower" for the daughter church. They will need literature, Bibles, hymnals, a projector, chairs, and other ministry items. Evangelistic visits in homes where small groups (cells) are begun are the best way to start.

C. The Sharing Model: In this model, the church shares its facilities with a Hispanic group who may or may not be members of the church. A Spanish leader is necessary. Children may integrate into the English Sunday School while monolingual adults study in Spanish. Families worship together in Spanish. The problem might be that the church is unaware of the doctrine and practices of the Hispanic group.

D. The Missionary Model: I have explained this previously. The church works very closely with the "missionary" whom they have sent, supporting and helping him as he begins a new church. They work together through home evangelism, discipleship, and Bible study.

E. The Adoption Model: Hispanic groups have begun through the natural efforts of a Hispanic believer. They are unattached and unsupervised. The church may "adopt" them, train them in doctrinal studies, and foster their maturity. It is

good to have a time of “courtship” before getting married. Those who are “easy come” are often “easy go.”

F. The Accidental Parenthood Model: This is not suggested, but it is often a reality. A nucleus of people breaks off from the parent church and may wish to become a “daughter” of another church. Often the new relationship is strained due to personality conflicts, leadership struggles, doctrinal disagreements, or moral issues.

In all this, when there is a sincere desire to build God’s kingdom and plant new churches, whichever the model, he will lend the tow sacks.

I’m sure I got this from some source, but I have no idea where. I have seen all these models in action and have taught most of them to hundreds of men around the world. However, there is absolutely nothing like going to a place in the world where you know no one and leaving a vibrant, dynamic, reproducing church of believers honoring Almighty God behind when you depart.

FULL TOW SACKS

All servants of God in any of the many areas of service can testify of God's blessings in their lives and ministries. Anyone who knows me and our family will agree that there is not a lot of flash, sparkle, or eloquence among us. However, most will agree that one little attribute that we all stumbled across somewhere in our journey is that of hard work. We have been pretty active wherever the Lord has led us. Admitting to being just simple little men, God has allowed us, as a family, to see some of the greatest things human eyes can witness. We have seen thousands of people come to faith in Christ, be baptized, and work in the hundreds of churches around the world where they live. We have seen many simple little uneducated peasant people fall in love with Jesus and spend the remainder of their lives sharing their faith with others; many of them lead the churches they have begun in their villages. You just don't see that everywhere, every day. At least in some of the areas where we have worked, it is just the way of life with these folks. How can God use little, insignificant, ignorant, and unlearned men to do such tremendous things in the world where they live? It's simple. HE does it! HE is so gracious to merely allow some of us to observe what he does. "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, neither has entered into the heart of man the thing God has prepared for those who love him."

I'm just saying that he has piles of tow sacks to fill in the lives of those who will but dare to follow him into the mountains, rivers, jungles, ghettos, metropolises, and even beyond the unknown. He has empty tow sacks that he will lend to all who will listen to that "still, small voice" as he beckons. The fields have always been "white unto harvest," and the tow sacks are available to be filled with the blessings that the Master of the harvest is ready to give, but the problem is the same as always: the laborers are few. So, as you finish reading these simple words, would you just whisper a prayer

to the Lord of the harvest and ask him to send laborers to his harvest? He will lend the tow sacks. I have tried to share a few of the things I have seen him do, and I know he is ready and able to do exceeding, abundantly above everything I have seen or thought. To him be all the glory.

JOHNSON CLAN

Taffy loves our family and is so special in all our activities. She has stated, "Though I never had any children of my own, since I married you all the grandchildren have been born and they are all, every one, mine." She proves it every day. Grady and Denise continue in Mexico after twenty years of faithful service there. Their children, Alan and Amanda, are working and studying in Texas. Scott and Xochitl are working in the Memorial Baptist Church in Tomball, Texas. He teaches Spanish Sunday school and works with the Hispanic ministry. He is a mechanical engineer for Toshiba in Houston, and Xochitl teaches bilingual elementary school. They are both proud Texas Aggies. Their three children are Martha, Ian, and Samuel. Eric is now Director of International Missions for the BMA of America. It has been my joy to work with him and see God lend him tow sacks in almost all he does. He and Kelly have three super kids, Audrey, Matty, and Abram. Jon is Director of Operations for E-Tech in Lufkin, Texas. He married a preacher's daughter, Jessica, and they have three great kids, Liam, Piper, and Cullen. They are active in First Baptist Jacksonville, Texas. Ben is Director of Operations for E-Tech in Nacogdoches and Rusk. He and Crystal have four boys: Logan, Gavin, Peyton, and Evan. They are active in First Baptist Jacksonville, Texas. Sara married Tommy Rose whom she met at Jacksonville College. They are missionaries in Querétaro, Mexico, where they are beginning the task of planting their first church there. They have four wonderful kiddos: Micah, Silas, Eisley, and Kaison. I can truly say that with six children, their mates, nineteen grandchildren, and two godly ladies who have loved us and cared for us, that "when God starts giving, he will even lend you the tow sacks." Amen.