

A GLIMPSE AT OUR WEEK WITH PARADISE BOUND

L . B A U M A N

PSALM 57: 9 - 11

I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.

The first day in the village we were greeted by the huge, brown, eager, curious, hopeful, and somewhat tentative eyes of many children. The parents stood more at the perimeter. A small piece of candy, granola bar or tennis ball handed out helped to quickly break the ice. By the end of the day, and on our next two days in the village, the children rushed to meet us, bathed us in their smiles, greeted us with hugs and wanted to do anything to help by carrying drills, buckets, and backpacks.

The children quickly wanted to be a part of the building process—handing us screws and trying out the drills (we went through a lot of batteries as they thought it was fun to push the button over and over, even when there was nothing to drill.) Language didn't really matter as eager hands and smiles crossed over the language barrier. Dan had told us before we began "to leave our western thinking behind. The houses will all get built on time and if anyone in the village wants to help you, let them; let them be involved, make sure you take time to make relationships with these people." It was through this attitude and focus that we were blessed to see God working over and over and over again.

Then on day three as the homes were finished (yes in only 3 days) and the dedications began. Each group of five who built the house went in along with the family members, Dan and Hermano Jesus (the Guatemalan pastor). This was the time when the gospel was presented. Dan and Hermano's words focused not on a religion, but rather a personal relationship with God where he can feed them, nurture them and cleanse them spiritually. The rest of us surrounded the house, prayed and read scripture. By the third house we had a sense of what it must have been like to be the disciples in the garden with Jesus. We felt so exhausted, finding it hard to stay focused in prayer. Among us were some true prayer warriors and it was a blessing to pray with them, by them, and learn from them.

I wish I could describe it for you. We felt God's spirit moving. All five families accepted Christ that day. Dan and his team will continue to do follow up ministry with them. One family, a widower with six children, stands out in my mind. One of his daughters, whom we had met the very first day, had such sadness in her eyes, a heaviness on her heart that was visible. When the gospel was shared in this home she fell to her knees amidst her family and wept. Years of pain and sorrow seemed to be released in her tears and cries to God. Only God could fill her void and give her hope. Afterward, she visibly looked different. She had found in God what she had been longing for—to know she is His child, his beloved, his chosen and she is saved.

Day four and five were our medical clinic days. Some of our group helped with the clinic, while others played among the children and families. Then the Jesus film was shown on a huge white sheet. For many this is the first movie they have ever seen. When the film is finished Hermano Jesus shares the gospel of salvation. Hermano then invites those who want to accept Jesus as their Savior to come and pray with him. As a group we join those who come up, placing our hands on them and praying for them. In the first village the entire village came forward and accepted Christ for the first time or reaffirmed their faith in him. In the second village many seemed hesitant to come forward. Slowly one man stepped forward. It was amazing to see as one came forward, many followed. Dan later posed these questions to us: "Are you stepping out in Christ? Will you be that one who will simply go to Christ, mattering not the cost? Who will you follow?" It was in this village too, that many women knelt on the ground crying as they prayed, their souls so open, raw, and bear to God.

Each evening ended with group devotions. First singing our praises to God, then sharing our experiences of the day and the ways we saw God working in the people we met, in ourselves and in our physical surrounding and situations. Dan would then lead us in scripture and devotions. For many of us it was a time when scripture came alive. We often felt like the disciplines- caught up in our own thinking, reasoning or plans of how things should go; and then, witnessing and feeling God directing us to follow him, to trust in him, to wait on him, and to rely on him. We were able to know how present God always is when we allow our eyes to be open to him.

Joyful, joyful we adore you, God of glory, Lord of love. Hearts unfold like flowers before you, opening to the sun above.