

FROM Bill - Gaining perspective - Nicaragua 2013

This is my journal I kept during my week in Nicaragua. I know it seems long, and if you want, feel free to just browse the pictures, but I was able to gain some perspective on our world and I'd love to share it with you. I'll keep it entertaining, I promise!

Day 1: Most of the team met at Glen Burnie Baptist Church early and had a wonderful time talking about all that God would have in store for us in the week to come. We took their van to the airport and met the remaining members of our group of 15. It was a very diverse group from 3 different denominations representing 4 different churches. Funny how doing the Lord's work can bring a unity rarely found anywhere else. After 2 flights, we made it to Nicaragua and met the first potential roadblock. Customs in Nicaragua can be a nightmare and



sometimes you enter with less than you brought. We had a potential bullseye on us as our group of 15 had almost 50 bags (No, it wasn't all clothes and hairdryers, but bowls, T-shirts, coloring books, crayons, Bibles, backpacks etc for the people of Nicaragua), but amazingly only one of Shannon's bags was checked and quickly passed through. God certainly had a hand in it as the customs officer,

we later found out, was a real bear to deal with in the past, singling out Christian mission groups. Driving to the compound, I immediately noted how unregulated Nicaragua seems. People just drive. There are roads, but lets just say the horn is used liberally. Most cars had at least one headlight out and I counted at least 10 regulations that would have the bureaucracies in America freaking out. The homes had no glass windows but most had bars. It looked like the poorest parts of America and yet we never crossed into a middle class neighborhood. Food is



unregulated, every kind of car-type transportation is on the road, water is unregulated, traffic is unregulated. It is the opposite of America today. It is as if our government collapsed and we all had to fend for ourselves. Trash is everywhere. After unpacking and enjoying a great home cooked meal and a time of prayer and praise we went to bed, ready for the adventure our Master had in store for us.



Day 2: Today started with personal bible study. I decided to read Francis Chan's book, "Crazy Love" this week. It seemed fitting and I recommend it if you go on a Mission trip. Today he said that in surrendering ourselves to God's purposes, He will bring us the most pleasure in this life and the next. I want Christ to be the standard I measure my life by, not other believers. As I walk around the compound, I see swings, sliding boards, and jungle gyms that used to be used by orphans before the government took the children away. I saw cribs with nothing but stuffed teddy bears



that used to be the beds for many needy children. Praise God the work of Messiah Project still continues for the kingdom, only in a different capacity. Group devotions this morning were about following Christ in unity, and being willing to change our plans for God's, followed by one last time of practice of the worship songs in Spanish.

Driving to our first village, El Boneno, I notice how skinny all of the animals are, skinny chickens, skinny horses, skinny dogs, and tons of aloe Vera plants



everywhere. We set up in the village and broke out the soccer ball and played with the kids in the town. All went well until I kicked a ball and hit a little girl in the side of the face. She started crying and I felt bad that I couldn't even say I'm sorry in her language. I'm thinking, what a great start to our trip, but a hug later and all seemed well. We sang our Spanish songs, did our Jonah skit, in which I played Jonah, and it was my time to give my testimony. I didn't mind going first. I shared how I was glad to be there and how I was there to serve my Master and to serve them. I shared the gospel in simple terms. Our interpreter is sick this week, but praise the Lord, Norma from our team interpreted, and I pray God was able to use my humble abilities for his kingdom.



We then broke into stations for activities for the families. Karen & Shannon fed people soup in the bowls we brought and made bead necklaces for the kids...I say kids but they also made one for a lady who was 80 years old and her father...yes father, at 112. I got to work with Jean and Dan at the photo station. Most of these people have never even seen themselves in a mirror and we gave families a picture they could take home printed on



photo paper. They were so excited. We also did face painting and balloon animals. We gave all the kids coloring books and a pack of crayons and of course the gospel was clearly presented by Pastor Roberto.

After a quick lunch we got back on the bus and headed to do it all over again in the second and much larger village La Reconciliacion. This was a much larger group of people and a much smaller place to do ministry but it still went smoothly and God used our voices and our message and our love to give a clear expression of the gospel. The day ended with a cool shower (no hot water), a time of worship and testimony, and our missionary host, Steve's testimony about Gods leading through the good and bad times in the history of Messiah Project. You can read more about it at www.mpnica.org



Day 3: Devotions today from Crazy Love is about spiritual amnesia, where we know who God is and what God has done and yet get out into the world and seem to forget it all in our daily walk. Then a question that hit home: We ask God why so many are starving. He has more right to ask US why so many are starving. We would see that in vivid detail this week.



After breakfast we packed up and headed out to village 3 called Cenisa near the coast. The trip to the coast was quite different than the drive yesterday. There were well paved roads and larger ranches along the way. It seemed much like Carroll County and felt a bit more like home. The ministry was good and the kids participated well in the singing and loved the drama. We fed them and did activities with them. We packed t-shirts the night before but forgot to bring them. I'm sure God has a plan for them on another day. We headed over to the church to eat lunch at the second stop of the day, a village on the coast called Casares.



After ministry inside the church building for a change, we headed to the beach a few blocks away. The Pacific Ocean was beautiful. Then we headed back to the compound for another cold shower and yummy dinner and group devotions. We shared our ups and downs that day and Karen shared how she had held a bowl of food for a girl so she could get her picture taken and in the wild confusion that is the photo station, the food wound up with the wrong person

and the little girl wound up not getting any food. Karen has such a soft heart anyway, but this totally broke her. She felt responsible but God can certainly work any circumstance for good, and we all are learning to put our trust in that.



Day 4: Sunday! We are having service here at the compound, and instead of going to the villagers, they are coming to us. Today's reading in Crazy Love was a "profile of the lukewarm", and a sobering warning to make sure we are good soil. It's easy to either be choked out by such abundant blessing as we have in America or scorched by the cares and trials of lack as there is here in Nicaragua. We all have our traps we can fall in. Good soil that produces fruit and leads to eternal life is not a place where we ask "what's the least I can do and still go to heaven" but rather is willing to forsake our circumstances, take up our cross, and follow him. (Luke 9, Matthew 13)



Hey, I just thought of a joke. How do you know you're on a mission trip? Your bug spray doubles as cologne. Anyway, Karen Shannon and I will be singing for our group devotions today. Mini concert! No, I never take a Sunday off! One of the busses coming to the service had a flat tire so worship was a tad longer than usual, but they just worshipped for an extra hour and even though we didn't understand much at all, we were all praising the same Savior. They certainly worshipped like their worship was all they had to offer to God and in many cases it was. He was pleased with their offering!



After the service, I was able to help feed the huge group that was there since we didn't do photos at this service. The meal consisted of a rice soup base that is enriched with all the vitamins and minerals they need. Many from the villages bring vegetables they grow to add to the pot. They bring their best because they know this meal comes from God and they want it to be the best.

Before lunch we had a special presentation of a backpack and leather bound bible to 6 of the local pastors. It would take them 2 years to be able to save up to get these. We made sure they knew this gift was not from us but from The Lord.



After lunch and a 5 minute nap we packed up to go to the village of Retirado Del Ejercito. There were more men here than most villages we had been to because this village is the land that the government gave to their retired soldiers. There was no place to sit so they all just stood around in a semicircle. I felt bad that they had to stand up the whole time but it wasn't an issue as



midway through the second verse of "Yo Tengo Gozo", it started to drizzle. It is the rainy season after all. We cut a song out and went right to the skit of Jonah. Up to that point I only had to roll around in the dry dirt (belly of the whale). Amazingly, as the story got to the part where the storm kicked up ...the storm kicked up. By the time I got spit out there was a nice mud puddle in front of me. I just went for it. I was soaked already, what was a little mud. As soon as the skit was over the rain tapered off and we were able to give out the "blessings" and play with the kids. We even were able to take pictures. I sat on the bus to print the pictures off, so the printer would not get wet, and felt a bit like a food truck operator for photos. I read

another chapter in Crazy Love on the way back to the compound. Chan gave the statistic that if we make \$4000 a month, we make 100x more than the average person on this earth. I believe it and its sobering to me.

For devotions tonight I shared with the team from John 21 about how Jesus confronted Peter after his "3 year mission trip" was over and told him to continue on feeding His sheep even after He left. The lesson was to keep on with a servant mindset when we get home.

Day 5: Today's devotions in Crazy Love opened with an interesting question: "If you could have heaven with no sickness, and everyone you ever loved, and all the food you ever liked, all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the beauties you ever saw, with no physical conflict or natural disasters, could you be satisfied with Heaven if Christ was not there? Are we in love with being saved or are we in love with Christ? The closer I grow to Christ the more I want to know Him, love Him.



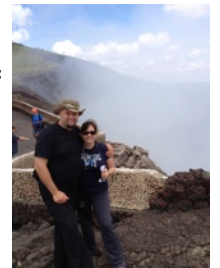
Today is our sightseeing day. The first stop is Kathy's Waffle House for breakfast in Grenada, the oldest Spanish colony in the southern hemisphere. Bacon pancakes, western omelet and pineapple pancakes were on the menu and, while off our diet, were fantastic. We



the took a 1 hour boat cruise of Lake Nicaragua, and stopped by Monkey Island, a private little island sanctuary for monkeys owned by a veterinarian and Shannon got to feed the monkeys. We saw several islands 100 yards or so in diameter, formed by the volcano in the distance, that are privately owned.



From there we drove to Masaya Volcano National Park, one of the most active volcanos in Latin America. On the way there, we drove past a group of boys on the side of the road and Steve recognized one of the boys as one from the orphanage. The boy, now 13 or 14 recognized the bus and we turned around. It was a touching display of love when we stopped to see this boy run up to Steve and embrace him. He was in the orphanage until



the government took the kids and now he wanders the streets with so many others. We drove on to the volcano and I actually wound up sweating more hiking up the mountain on our day off than the rest of the work days. It's a hot one today.

We took some time to do some touristy shopping in Masaya and we got a few trinkets for Jessica & Ryan at home. Then we went to eat dinner at Carolina's, a restaurant owned by a Christian family in Catarina. It rained later in the day today, and I was glad since today was the only day I didn't have to roll around on the ground. After devotions we went to bed, ready for the longest, most busy day of the trip...



Day 6: Today we are actually going to three different villages. The first is La Chudeca which is basically the city dump where children and adults dig through the trash for food and "valuables" they can sell or recycle for money. Today's devotional reading is the contrast between the lukewarm and the obsessed. The lukewarm love the lovely and the loving. The love God wants us to show, the love of those obsessed with Christ, is one that loves those who hurt us, one that loves and forgives those who hurt those we love, one that loves the unlovely and those who are unloveable.

After reading this, God gave us a chance to put this to the test.

A strange thing happened on the way there. For the first time since being here, looking at the dwellings, people and roads, it all started to look normal to me. The shock value of how the people live had worn off and I began to adapt to my surroundings...then we pulled up to the dump. The shock is back!

Everyone is doubling up on the bug spray as we approach the dump. The windows need to be closed blocks away or the bus-van will be infested with flies. We need to exit quickly for the same reason. This stop reminds me that in America, there are so many sources of "hope". That could be why it is so easy for Americans to turn to Jesus as only a last resort. For these people their hope cannot be in this world. Christ's eternal kingdom is their only source of hope. The look in their eyes, while one of desperation, was still one of joy that can only come through Christ in that situation. We met a young girl who was 8 months pregnant and more than likely would be giving birth in that place. Pray for her and her baby.



During our service, the new trash was being delivered, but many stayed there to hear the gospel instead of following their normal inclination to rummage through the new deposit for the best stuff before the vultures could carry it away. They seemed to know what the greatest treasure is. After



doing our full program we gave away some blessings and headed to our second village, Aragon.

Everything went very smooth as we fed the people from 3 different villages, sang songs, gave blessings from The Lord, and shared the clear gospel message. It is hot today, but no rain so we praise the Lord for that. We are tired but there is one more village today...El Cuatro.



El Cuatro is a small village but they were the first to have a little store that sold snacks and a few toiletries. It was also the first that had "public restroom facilities". What a sweet group of people. Whereas most places swarmed us at the photo station, pressing in ever closer and closer, these people just stood there patiently in a line for their picture to print. It went so smoothly, we actually had time to just sit around and fellowship with the people afterwards for a while.

I don't know when I have ever looked forward to a shower more. After today, I didn't care what temperature the water was, it just felt good to be cool and clean. After dinner we shared personal stories and testimonies of the day and many shared of the pregnant woman at the dump and were moved to tears over the prospect that her baby would be born in such conditions. I reminded them that God was in control of every circumstance and that wasn't the first baby born in lowly conditions, for our Savior, the God of the universe was laid in a manger surrounded by filthy animals. As with all circumstances in our lives, it is all in His hands.

I have been eaten up pretty good by chiggers since getting here (probably from rolling all over the ground doing the Jonah skit) so I took a benedryl today and it knocked me out so I am going to bed early.

Day 7: The last day of ministry. I can only sleep for so long, so since I went to bed early last night, I am up before everyone today. This is good as we have to leave for the airport at 4 am tomorrow so it



won't be such a shock to the system. I am catching up on my journal, having the first of my 4 cups of coffee this morning (not just because the cups are small but because the coffee here is excellent). I will get a head start on my devotions in Crazy Love. The challenge today is to live as though everyone we come in contact with is Christ. I know that will take some time to form that habit. It's actually pretty easy to do here since everyone is in such a state of need. The real challenge will be when I get home and someone drives too slow in the fast lane in front of me. We'll see, but that is one of the 3 things I determined to change when I get back

home. Another is to not get stressed over circumstances. I know God is in control, but when we are running 30 minutes late to a concert, or if a downpour comes just after I set up the whole sound system outdoors (as it did 3 times already this year), I will take it in stride and not get so stressed out. If I can't change the circumstance, I will learn through it. The third will probably be to get up earlier and not to waste so much time watching TV. (sadly, I spend a lot of time doing things that will be burned up in the fire at the Bema Seat).



Another thing I learned from last night's devotions was how to respond when someone tells me how "great" I sing. Doing what I do, I hear that a lot, but have always questioned what I should say. I've read Luke 17:7-10 before but it answered that question I have always asked...



"Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'" I am an unworthy servant and am only doing my duty...yeah...that sounds about right!



After breakfast, worship and a devotional from 1 Samuel 3 about listening to The Lord when he speaks, we took a tour of the unfinished buildings in the compound that we believe will one day house orphans again. Even though the government has taken the kids away, they are following God's original vision through to the end.



One day I hope to come back down and see an orphanage full of children. Until that day, Messiah Project's evangelistic efforts continue and they are now growing vegetables in the compound to take and add to the nourishing meals in those areas where they can't grow their own because of bad soil conditions.

The first stop today is Kilometer 27, so named because the village is at...kilometer 27. As we pulled up they were all lined up to greet us. This was the most loving of all the villages. The minute we stepped off the bus the kids ran up to us and wanted to take pictures with us. Everyone got several hugs and even I had little kids come up and give me the biggest hugs. Karen gave her testimony there and told



the kids that she loved them and will be praying for them. She also told them that God loved them and that if they put their trust in Him they will never be alone. (We found out later that the offering we gave to the Messiah Project will go to build this village a brush arbor to hold their services in)



The second stop today is a villa Carazo. We arrived early and they were having a prayer service. It sounds like they couldn't decide who would pray so they all did...at once. It was hot but the mothers and children all stayed in the heat through our whole service. We met a darling boy named Wilson who had a "W" shaved into his hair. We left and made one last stop at the local grocery store, picked up a few snacks for our last night, and a few more pounds of Nicaraguan coffee. Jean



treated everyone to an ice cream cone.



We had one last time of worship and testimonies and went to bed early as we had to get up at 2:30 am to go to the airport. We learned this week that we make plans only to get moving then expect God to change them. Our first test was at the airport. Although we arrived a couple of hours before our flight, Karen, Shannon, and I, along with a young teen named Heather were put on standby as they overbooked the flight. Mary, Bob, and Jean from our team decided to stay



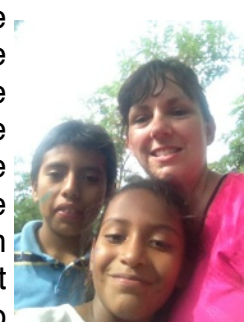
and fly tomorrow so the four of us could all get on this flight. It wasn't the ending of this trip we planned, to leave 3 of our team behind, but God had other plans and everything belongs to him so that's ok.

FROM KAREN - Our trip to Nicaragua was an incredible experience. From the moment our feet touched the ground, we found ourselves out of our comfort zone, and it truly was the beginning of an experience where we saw God in a different light than we had ever seen Him before. While we were there we went from village to village feeding the people, singing praises, giving out Gospel bracelets, necklaces, t-shirts, bowls, and hand made dresses. These seemed like such small things but when you saw the desperate poverty of the people, the gifts were treasures in their eyes. It was humbling to give a bowl of food to a child and know that might be their only meal that day. We met pastors who travel from village to village in the remote areas preaching the gospel seven days a week and not being payed a cent.



There were a couple of particular experiences that really touched me personally. The first was when we went to a dump. The people that live there survive totally on what comes in from the trash truck. Vultures are everywhere and everyone fends for themselves picking out what might be of some value to them and might help them survive. The touching thing was that while we were doing the ministry, the truck came. A couple of the people left and were able to be

the first to pick through what was dropped there. The ones who stayed for the ministry must have really struggled as they knew the best would be gone when we were done. But they stayed because they were hungry to hear the Word spoken and desired so much to know that God was with them and cared for them and that His people cared for them. Another touching village was one that has been set up for the veteran soldiers of the Nicaraguan army. They are a bit jaded because many have come to





them in the name of God and never followed through with what they said. They are open to the Messiah Project because of the faithfulness of the workers to keep coming back and doing everything they promised to do. Halfway through our Jonah skit, it began to pour down rain on us, but we kept going and just finished the skit. This was an important moment because they had been praying for rain, the rain came just as we said the words "And God sent a great storm" and because we stayed, it proved to them that they had value to us. That day many men prayed for salvation and this very week work has been started to clear land for a church to be built. The third special experience that I want to share is one of the last villages where we ministered. It doesn't even have a name, it is just called Kilometer 27.

The children there were so dear. They just clung to us and wanted us to stay. They have such soft hearts there and their eyes were filled with tears when we left. It was hard to leave...

There were countless stories that took place while we were there, it is too much to tell in one letter. The things that impressed me the most were that God is in control, God wants us to desperately seek His face as if He is all there is to live for (because He is all there is to live for), God is with us in our deepest need just as He is with the people in the dump. The material wealth we have in our country is just a means to do more for His kingdom for it truly is worthless when hoarded and clung to. I want to give more, serve more, and not plant my roots too deep in the soil of this earth. Thank you for making this trip possible for us.



FROM BILL, KAREN, & SHANNON - To those who prayed and supported us, we are forever grateful. This has been an eye-opening week and we recommend, if you haven't already, going on a trip that is out of your country and your comfort zone. We plan on changing some things in our lives...if we don't change, this trip only lasted a week. If we do change, it lasted an eternity!