

## Nicaragua Trip Journal - Year Three

### Day 1

Here we go again! During this trip, I will be keeping a journal of the ways God uses our team and the thoughts and feelings I have as the trip unfolds. This will be our third trip to this beautiful country in as many years. As in the last two years we are going to be working with Messiah Project, visiting villages, feeding the people, giving little “blessings”, showing love to them, and most importantly, giving them the gospel through preaching, singing, and testimonies. Right now, our team of 8 is waiting for our flight to Atlanta on route to Managua, Nicaragua.



I am so thankful for the nearly 60 people who have supported us these past three years. These trips have given us an opportunity to be obedient to our Lord, reach many with the glorious gospel, serve others, and view the world in a different context.

Each year I have chosen a book to read during my time here and since this whole journey three years ago was spurred on by the book "radical " by David Platt, this year, I am going to read and share insights from his new book, "Counter Culture".



This will be Ryan's first trip with Karen, Shannon, and me. I am excited to see how his paint-board message is received by the people in Latin America. Joining us are Bob and Mary, the organizers of the trip, and two new faces, JoAnn and Michael, both friends we have met in our ministry.

Today, in his introduction to the book, David Platt discusses the problem of picking and choosing which social injustices evangelicals will fight to end and which ones about which they will be content to just remain quiet. Usually it's a matter of which ones they will receive praise for, like poverty, human trafficking, and slavery, and which ones are controversial, and Christians are likely to be criticized for like abortion and homosexuality. In a world where everything revolves around "self", we

are called to put aside all self-preservation and live for God's glorification.

We just landed in Managua and made it through customs without any problems. Fortunately, our day of flying and maneuvering the airports and customs has been uneventful. That's the way we like it! As an added blessing, on the flight here, I was crammed in a row like a sardine in the back of the plane and just before takeoff, the stewardess asked me if I'd like to move forward to a seat over the wing. I had double the leg space and a free seat next to me! On an unrelated note, the flight didn't seem nearly as long to me but Karen thought it would never end, crammed in between Ryan and Shannon.

As we make the long trek to Land of Judah (the compound where we stay), I pray for the people I see just hanging out on the side of the road. It's late, and there are still people just roaming the streets. Some have nowhere to go. Back home there is a lot of roadwork where we live and I am forever stopped, staring at a worker blocking traffic as the cars pass me on the other side. Here we just passed roadwork and no one was stopping traffic, the cars just kept going on both sides and we all just squeezed by and kept going. I like that. Things keep moving. There are several motorcycles out tonight and I am beginning to think it is illegal here to have any less than two riders at any time. On the flip side, we just got behind a semi that, I'm guessing, has all of a 4 cylinder engine pulling it uphill. We'll be here a while.

This country, while under a dictatorship is still a safe place to go on a mission trip. I am thinking of those who truly risk their lives taking the life-giving gospel to countries where the risk of being shot, imprisoned, or beheaded is real every minute of every day. There are special rewards in heaven for those faithful ones.

## Day 2

This morning, Bob shared a devotion from Ephesians 3 about God's love in us, and after a time of sharing, singing, and praying, we are heading to the first village, **Carolina**. On the way I got into chapter one of Counter Culture. Platt makes the case that the gospel is, by its very nature, offensive to the culture. Culture is selfish, and to deny self and obey a Creator is offensive to that mindset. It makes me wonder how many of my thoughts words and actions are selfish. Lord forgive me for my selfish rebellion and idolatry of myself.



The program went well at the first village. We fed the 80 people there and they were all attentive as Ryan did his paint-board. There was a dear little girl who reminded me of Siri, but I imagine that will happen all week. The cord for the guitar had a bad connection and kept cutting out, but here, we learn to just roll with the punches, a lesson I need to remember setting up for our concerts in the states.

The next village is called **Los Marqueses**. As we drive there, I read more from Platt's book. As he explains how most people will follow the culture of self right into hell, I can't help but think of the people we drive by who have so little here, but are still living their best life now because they only have an eternity apart from Christ to look forward to. Thank you Lord for giving me the opportunity to bring the good news to these people.



The most offensive claim in Christianity is not what Christians believe about homosexuality or abortion, but that God is the Creator, Owner, and Judge of every person on the planet. Platt calls us to a life beyond self-righteous complacency to self-sacrificing commitment.

We pulled up to the field where we are supposed to do our program and no one is here. There is usually a big group just standing around waiting for us to arrive. After about twenty minutes, we realized no one is coming, so we got out to play around with a whiffle ball and bat. A couple of minutes later, a few kids walked by, and we got them to play with us. A few more kids joined, so I ran back to the van and got the guitar and a couple of Christian "Magic Tricks", and a half hour later we found ourselves doing a program and giving out blessings to 30 kids! Talk about being ready in season and out of season. And this season is hot...although they say it is winter here now. I'll be ready for a nice cold shower after this. We closed the day with a spaghetti dinner, prayer and discussion about the day's events, not to mention, a ruthless game of Phase 10.

## Day 3

This morning, after my daily scripture reading, I scrapped the devotional I had planned and taught about being slaves of Christ from Romans 6. We have been bought out of the slave market of sin and now are slaves of the One who bought us with His blood.

As I study Platt's book, he talks about care for the poor, a fitting discussion in this country. He lays out 5 principles for Christians in living in a world with poverty: work diligently, live simply, give sacrificially, help constructively, and invest eternally.

Today, we will be a part of a training service here at **Land of Judah**. Steve preached a message about the vision for the ministry from Proverbs 28:18. It was all in Spanish, but he told me about it the night before. He spoke about how Christ's vision he left with the church was a lifestyle focused on going and making disciples. When the politics crept in and the church became the established religion 300 years after its creation, the church model became a place you go, and your life the rest of the time is disconnected from "God's time". When the reformation came in the 1500s, the message came back to the Bible, but denominations were formed and the model stayed the same. We need to get back to a lifestyle of discipling others wherever we go and not just wait for pastors to do it for us on Sunday.



As we drive to the next village today, **Santa Rosa**, The next chapter of Platt's book gives the startling statistic that one-third of American women have had or will have abortions. He calls us to not speak out from a heart of party politics, but from gospel passion.



Santa Rosa was a little tiny village, but about 50 people showed up and were eager to sing and loved Ryan's message. Ryan let them keep the paint-board and they were still discussing it as we drove away.



When we were giving out the "blessings", Steve told

us that there is a mindset in this country that was developed after the war here. Humanitarian relief groups would come in and throw money around and the people would just grab as much as they can until it ran out, and that would last them until the next group would come in. That mindset is why we limit the "blessings" we bring, and make sure they know that these blessings are from the Lord and not from the "rich Americans".

## Day 4

Today is a big day, in that, we will be going to some larger villages. In my Bible reading today, I read Romans 8 and it gave me peace to know that all those who are saved are justified, called, and loved by God from before the foundation of the world and nothing can separate us from that love. I believe there are His sheep out there in the villages today who are not yet in the fold, but they will come to Him because nothing can separate them from God's love. I am so amazed that God would use us as His instruments to reach them.



The next chapter in Platt's book deals with orphans and widows. 18 million children have lost both parents in this world, so the need for the church in this area is great. As we drive to the village, **San Carlos 2**, I am reminded that today is the Lord's day, not because I looked at my phone, but because I see many lined up for mass at the Catholic Churches. So many souls are led away from the truth and caught up by this hybrid religion of historic Christianity and satanic superstition. They need to be redeemed not by a magical Christ hanging on a cross, but by the living God in the flesh. As I drive by, David Platt tells the story of Ruth and the Kinsman Redeemer and relates it to orphans and widows. I can just imagine how

many orphans and widows there are here in Nicaragua. I wonder if this country is even open to adoptions to America?

Several villages turned out for the service this morning. God had recently provided them with a new meeting place, an open air shelter with a tin roof. They kept apologizing for how, in man's view, they are poor and don't have chairs to sit on, but we were the ones humbled by their hospitality and love for the Savior. They were so generous and a very energetic bunch and were very receptive to the message we brought. The pastor ended with a call to follow Jesus. We played soccer with the kids before the service, which probably wasn't a good idea for me. I have been having lower back muscular issues for a month now, and while it has been bothering me all week, something as simple as scooping out food for them really aggravated it. I will take it as easy as I can and pray God will give me the strength to do what I need to do in the days ahead.



The next village is called **Versailles**. We pulled in and quickly assessed the area and picked the perfect place to set up. Seconds before we were ready to start, the weather changed and the rain began to pour down. We all ran under a little porch and once we realized the rain wasn't going to quit, we just stood there and did the program crammed under the portico. And what a program it was. Those kids sang louder than us, and we were amplified! We fed them, gave out blessings and headed back to Land of Judah. On the way back home, Platt addressed the Christian response to sex-trafficking, a disgusting practice around the world, and even in the U.S., that is just now getting the attention in the church it deserves. There are more slaves today than in the four centuries of african slave trafficking combined. We need to wake up to this problem and the church needs to speak out on this issue that enslaves 27 million people, more slaves than at any other time in human history.



We stopped on the way back to pick up a birthday cake for one of the chefs back at the compound. We learned the song, "Cumpleaños feliz" and sang it to her. She seemed embarrassed to be getting attention, but invited us to share the cake.

## Day 5



Today is our "Day off" although we have gospel tracks to give out, for evangelism never takes a rest...or shouldn't. My back spasms have been getting worse, so today I am wired up with a "tens" device that is helping. We picked up our translator, Osman, as he will be joining us today. He is really clicking with our group and has found a lot of common interests with Ryan...especially drumming.

David Platt makes the very valid point that those who view pornography are just as guilty of supporting slavery as the slave owners in the 1800's. My heart is so broken as I look at these dear children in these villages and just know that there is a good chance that many will be approached by predators that would "buy" them into human sex slavery for the promise of money and a better life. I am going to pray every day that these dear girls and boys would be kept from harm and protected

from this awful life millions have been pulled into.

After breakfast at "Kathy's" we took a walk through the Catholic Church/weird wax museum in Grenada. This is the oldest colony in the hemisphere and the tradition-led religion is just as established here. Satan and his false gospel of works have a stranglehold on these people, but God's power is greater and there are many being saved out of it. We then enjoyed a boat ride on lake Grenada. Everywhere we go, there are people ready to sell you mass produced trinkets. On this trip, however, our guide hand-made some necklaces and earrings for us. We took the opportunity to share the Gospel with him and left him with a gospel tract and a promise to pray for him.



After stopping at the grocery store to pick up enough coffee to keep an army awake (The locally grown coffee here is cheaper and way better than anything in the states), we headed off to see a live volcano close up and personal. It was then off to an open air market to buy some trinkets. We were able to give out a lot of tracts to the salespeople. After a delicious dinner and drive home, the rest of the team stayed up and talked about the day, but my back was giving me so much trouble that I took a shower and went right to bed.

## Day 6

Today, I feel a lot better after a good sleep. I will definitely put my back to the test as we are taking the off-road cargo truck with very little air flow in the cabin and even less shocks. We are taking this truck because these two villages are so far up in the hills that the regular van couldn't make it.

Today's reading deals with God's protective boundaries and divine plan for human sexuality and the church's call to counter the culture.

The first village is **La Concha**. We were expecting about 60-70 and arrived to find over 150. The church in this village has a great working relationship with the local public school, so when the school heard we were coming, they shut down classes and all came to the service. What a great opportunity to give the gospel to kids who may have never heard it. We left two boxes of tracts, Ryan's paint-board paper, and a gospel soccer ball to further take the gospel into the schools.



We drove on and stopped to eat in a park in the town of **San Marcos**. After eating we decided to have an impromptu "service" in the park. This was not in the plans, but with 2 former OAC preachers with us (Ryan and JoAnn), we were ready. We sang a few songs, Bob gave a short testimony, and JoAnn gave a quick message using simple magic tricks to illustrate the gospel. Two people came forward right away to take booklets, and 5 minutes later, we had given out all 30 we had brought! It is so good to have a believer who has done street evangelism before as translator too. Osman can not only translate word for word but even better explain the message in translation. Praise the Lord.

The next village is **El Chocoyo**. Here we were instructed to only give 1/2 bowl of food because they eat so infrequently, more would hurt their stomachs. What a sobering thought. When we pulled up, I immediately recognized the village as the "Wasp nest" village from last year. I recognized many of the same kids in 2014, including the little red-haired boy. I think this village is one of the poorest we've been to. They were especially thankful to get the health kits.



We came back and after a big dinner, Steve shared with us about some areas up in the mountains where they are fed 1/2 cup of vitamin enriched food every 3 days. Messiah Project needs our prayers as they seek to meet this physical need which is very great, and the spiritual need which is even greater.

### Day 7

Today is the last day of village ministry, and last night Michael expressed the feeling we all had our first year and every year since, that he didn't want to leave. Obviously, we all have responsibilities at home, but this feeling comes from the mind's cleansing of the pull of all the material

things and tight schedules we have in the states. Here it is only ministry and that is a place that seems like heaven to a believer. We don't want to come down off of the mountain top. This week is like no other and if you would like to join us next year, if God permits, let me know. It is one week in the summer

and the cost is very reasonable. Taking a week out of your life will not only change the lives of others, but spending a week outside of your normal context will change your life forever.



"19 De Julio" is the name of the first village today. We gave away the rest of the health kits here so there were just over 100 kids and their parents who heard the gospel. Last year, these people came to a service at the Land of Judah, but this year we went to them. They sat in weeds just waiting for their stomachs and souls to be fed.

The impromptu meeting in the town square went so well yesterday, we decided to do it again today. In the town of **Dolores** there were several school kids on lunch break in the park and we gave away a lot of tracts. Many were very attentive.

The next and last village for this trip is called **La Paz**. As we travel there, I finish another chapter in Platt's book about religious liberty, about how some Christians in America are either forced to give up their free exercise of religion in the public square or defile their conscience. In some respects, America is a place of freedom of worship and in other ways, the dictatorship of Nicaragua is more free. Whether or not government forces business owners to provide products that violate their consciences, we are called to apply clear gospel convictions in our lives and our work. We must always show the love of Jesus, and will render to Caesar what is Caesar's, but we will not bow the knee and give to Caesar what is God's. Our ultimate responsibility is to Him.



This final village was indoor in a little patio of a home. They were cooking on the other side and the wind was blowing the smoke through the corridor as we sang and preached. I know what pit beef feels like. It was another sweet village and the kids were especially amazed by the magic trick. Smoke withstanding, this was a great little village to end our week.

We came back to Land of Judah and after dinner, Steve ended the evening with a challenge to not let our work for God take the place of our walk with God.

## Day 8



Today we go home. We come down off the mountain. I pray that the lessons we learned and were reinforced this week will carry on in the states. It will be much harder because everything I am surrounded by will pull me in a completely different direction, but I know that the Holy Spirit within me will work all of these things and all future circumstances for my Christlikeness. The first test came in Atlanta where the paint-board was late in coming to the baggage area. Our 3 hour layover turned into about 15 minutes. I admit, I failed the first test and began to get very stressed as I was the one leading the team to their final destination. I quickly remembered the lessons learned in the previous 7 days (not to mention the past 3 years) and decided to just trust that God would work it all out. He did. Our second plane

was delayed 2 1/2 hours because of the storm so we had plenty of time.

Today I also read the last chapter of "Counter Culture", and fittingly, it is about reaching the unreached. Platt closes with three questions:

Are we going to choose comfort or the cross?

Are we going to settle for maintenance or sacrifice for mission?

Will our lives be marked by indecisive minds or undivided hearts?

It all boils down to: Are we going to follow Jesus with ALL our lives?

My goal in this journal was to give you a feeling of what it was like being on this trip, but nothing is quite like being here serving. If you are interested in joining us for a future trip, just let me know and I'd be glad to give you the information as soon as we plan.

Thank you for your prayers and support and continue to pray for our family and for the dear people of Nicaragua!

Bill, Karen, Ryan, & Shannon Bailey Itzel