



Mission Trip Summary: November, 1999

Pastor Chad M. Miller

I haven't gotten over the jet lag and the drain of two intensive weeks of mission work, but I can't wait to tell you what happened on our Amazon Mission Trip. We saw the harvest!

After a day of planes, shuttles, re-routing, and delays, our mission team arrived in Manaus. This trip, Pastor John had made arrangements for our team to stay in the homes of several members of his church for our 5-day conference. This was a wonderful experience for our team members to make friends and really get a good feel for the culture of Manaus.

The first two days of our conference were spent in teaching the 200+ small group leaders and apprentices about opening their hearts to the lost and making their groups places where people can find acceptance, unconditional love and healing. Melody put it best as she shared what we have learned over the years in small group ministry in the United States: it's all about relationships. I led the first teaching presentation on the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) as a model for small group ministry. We also presented basic counseling training to help the small group leaders learn to deal with some of the ministry issues they encounter in their groups. The training sessions really went well and cast a vision for making every small group a healing place where people could come and find the love of Jesus. It was a powerful two days!

On Saturday evening, we celebrated the Commissioning and Consecration of the 100 group leaders of Pastor John's Church. The crowd was so large they rented a municipal pavilion near the Amazon River. It was a great night. Suits and formals were the attire of the group leaders. The worship was awesome! I delivered the message of the great life transformation that Jesus can bring through a small group

in a person's home using the account of Zacchaeus (Luke 19). I challenged the crowd to not just see the 100 leaders before them, but the 400 leaders that were going to be harvested from these groups within the next year! It was awesome! The Brazilians were so honored to have us there for this great event. They see us as their mentors who brought them this powerful ministry tool of small groups just a year and a half ago. Pastor John told me that after tonight his church would never be the same! He's right. We both looked out over the crowd seated in front of us encircled by the 100 consecrated and commissioned leaders holding hands and singing praise. It was clear what God was doing. We saw the harvest. And we know that there will be more – much more. Praise God!

On Sunday, we had another day of great worship to a packed church still celebrating from the night before. I warned them that after a great spiritual mountain-top experience like the one they had just experienced, that Satan would try to find ways to steal away the victory and discourage them. I encouraged them not to let anything cause them to doubt that God had chosen and commissioned them for a great work and gave them practical advice about staying focused in leading their small groups. They were ready for the spiritual battles ahead.

Then I preached on the miracle of the blind man of Bethsaida (Mark 8) and encouraged them to never underestimate the influence friends could have on bringing people to Jesus. I challenged them to look for the healing and restoring miracles of God in their small groups. Then Melody shared how they would have to carry a cross for Jesus as a small group leader. Donna then told about how her aunt who has severe arthritis in her hands had endured the pain to make each of the leaders a beautiful ribbon cross to encourage them to be courageous cross bearers. It was powerful to watch how serious and honored each of the leaders was as they took their cross. One leader came up to me and held his cross by the ribbon that dangled from it. He then slung it over his shoulder as a gesture that he was taking up his cross for Jesus. Powerful!

On Monday night, we started a second teaching conference for area pastors on Counseling Skills. Wes was the primary presenter for this two-day conference. He continued on Tuesday while the rest of our team traveled by bus to Itacoatiara, a port city at the junction of the Amazon and Madera Rivers. We had evening and morning workshops for two churches just starting small group ministry. Malena, Donna and Deidre shared their testimonies and it was a great encouragement to the pastors and leaders. They had such huge and open hearts for us.

We traveled most of the next day on a rough dirt road through the jungle to Itapiranga to Pastor Jason's Church. This is a very remote location, but a beautiful river village. We encouraged Pastor Jason and his people with teaching and testimonies from all of the team members. Pastor Jason is just starting to revive their small group ministry program for a 3rd time. Small groups have been tough to keep going in his church. At the end, we presented Pastor Jason with the \$161.00 raised by the children of Spirit of Life in their "Pennies for People" jar. When I told them our kids collected this money for them to build a children's ministry center. Jason was completely overwhelmed. It was one of the greatest encouraging gifts he had ever received.

We traveled by boat up the Uatuma River to San Sabastian to Pastor Guadisee's church. His church was the poorest of all the churches we visited. We brought a half a dozen duffel bags full of relief supplies, medicines and gifts. It was like Christmas to see them open the bags. The poverty is almost overwhelming.

We really cut costs and traveled as cheaply as possible on our trip so we could leave some money with Pastors Jason and Guadisee as an encouragement for the huge sacrifices they and their families make being pastors in the interior of the Rain Forest. We were able to present each of them with a \$500 gift of encouragement. They were both overwhelmed and speechless. Nothing like this has ever happened to them before.

We then, took a trip to another river town called Urucara. Pastor John wanted us to visit Urucara because a year ago on my second trip to Brazil, I gave a \$400 gift to them that they had used to buy a piece of land and are now building a church. We got to see the church just about finished. It was great to know we helped make planting a church in this town a reality. It's amazing what our money can do for the Lord in such a remote place like Urucara.

If you can imagine traveling by bus and boat near the equator for 5 days, sleeping in hotels (if you can call them that!) and grass huts, then you know we were pretty exhausted living so far outside our comfort zone. Pastor John knew we needed a rest so we spent our last night in a hacienda of one of his members outside of Manaus. It was great.

Our last evening was awesome. It was a night of testimonies at Pastor John's church. God did something tremendous as members of our mission team shared their testimonies of how God had changed their lives through the relationships they had found in small groups at Spirit of Life.

I told the packed church that all the teaching about small groups was meaningless if people's lives weren't changed for Christ. You should have heard the testimonies! They left our Brazilian brothers and sisters in awe. Now it was their turn to see the harvest God had raised up at Spirit of Life. We both saw the harvest in each other. The vision was clear for both of our churches. God wants our small groups to grow and become dynamic places where lives are constantly being changed and restored to Jesus. After that, there was nothing left to do but board our plane and prepare for the great work God has for us back at Spirit of Life.

It was time to come home.

We had seen the Harvest.

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