

GuatesUP?



For those of you concerned about me continuing to lose my marbles; I want to report that I continue to find them at an equivalent rate of losing them.

I want to tell you the story of this special marble. I was walking up the steep hill to the mission house having a nice visit with my dear friend Perlita. As we were talking about her collection jar of 5 centavo coins & my marble collection.... out of nowhere came this marble bouncing down the cobblestone street! It was like Plinko on the Price is Right and I was standing in the \$10,000 space! It stopped just as I reached down to catch it from rolling further down our steep hill. There were no kids or persons seeming to be looking for their dropped marble as I held it up in excitement. Y'all! I can't make this stuff up! Marbles literally find me here! That marble was a love letter from God. He always hears us, knows our hearts and shows us His loving presence in some of the most special ways. ~Shawn

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Daily Bread

We pull up to the distribution point at the Zone 3 Guatemala City garbage dump with 2,000 pounds of food. I roll down my window & am slapped hard in my masked face with the smell of rotting trash. The smell is so strong that it knocks me back 7 years to my first time at San Gabriel's garbage dump. Feelings of oppression and sadness begin to wash over me. I remember the overwhelming and unforgettable memories of my first time seeing humans, big & little, tearing open trash bags, sifting through endless piles of waste. I remember trying to make sense of what I was seeing. I remember gasping as I saw a little boy, no more than 3 yrs old, wearing a dreamcatcher necklace, sitting alone in a pile of trash, eating the crumbs out of the bottom of a discarded bag of chips. My stomach churns as I am reminded of the intense smell of rotting trash & flesh as we built a home at the base of the San Gabriel dump next to a place that processes animal carcasses into bone meal. I recall daily petitions to God asking if He would please provide me with the strength to endure and to not be nauseated. To remove my focus off of the smells, insects & vultures so I could serve with dignity & love, to those that have to live this way.

The loud beeping of a front-end loader snaps me back into the moment. We are directed into a parking lot so we can distribute the food packages, bibles & tracts alongside a ministry we have been joining forces with to serve more people, more safely. This did not feel safe at all. The long lines of desperate eyes peering above the mandatory masks began to form....mostly intoxicated men wearing clothing saturated from the rain & filth they work in. We share that we are here because of God's love for each of His children, we pray & give thanks to God. I prayed deep in my heart that I could pour God's love into each person as they passed by each of us to receive their packages. I looked every person in the eye and asked them a question to engage with them for a moment & to show them they mattered. Though desperation & oppression was in abundance, I saw many receive a small break from it, as they felt our compassion & Jesus' lavish love. We ran out of food & the peace I was feeling as we served began to wash away as I saw the lines of at least 30 more that were not going to receive. What will they do? How will they respond? How can we safely get out of here if needed? Fear began to creep in until I heard the sweet voice of an elderly woman say "thank you for coming here and helping so many". And each person peacefully turned & walked away. Well, everyone except for Juan. He was a bit drunk & a bit insistent that we had a bag of beans hidden somewhere just for him. We didn't, but we did have one extra bible. He kissed it as he received it and allowed me to share a bit about a few of my favorite passages. I pray for Juan, that he may receive God's daily bread, the bread that satisfies where he hungers the most.

2 *Update from the Mission Field: Praise & Prayer- From the Johnson's in Guatemala*

The past few months have been an emotional, blurry roller coaster ride stuck on repeat. I try to keep up on the news both in the USA as well as Guatemala so we can be responding in prayer, but honestly, it is so saddening & at times outraging, I tend to fully retreat into doing what I know is helpful & beautiful; serving others & praying that we can somehow as beloved children of creator Father God, surrender completely all the yucky messes of this world to Him & His perfect will. **Father God, we desperately need you! We give you thanks & praise. You are indeed here with us amidst our sinful messes. Your Holy Spirit lives in us & we praise you for this! May we live out Your will. Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven!**

Thanks to your gifts, over the past several weeks we have purchased & delivered many thousands of pounds of grains, vegetables & basic kitchen staples for more than 1,000 families. We have been blessed with ministry partnerships that work collaboratively in getting food into hard to reach villages & in larger numbers. We have had to be very fluid & flexible day to day in order to meet the emergent needs before us. As we have "breaks" in the food delivery chain which occur when we run out of funds to buy more, Brad & I will take a day to try to rest and tend to the home tasks that get ignored as we are on the run constantly. We are trying to work into the ever-changing & full schedule, the installation of stoves and lamina to families that were sponsored in February at our sweet on Guatemala event that we have not been able to tend to with the COVID crisis. In the coming months, as the country slowly opens up (we hopefully pray), we will start breaking ground for the ministry center that was supposed to happen this past April. **Father God, we give thanks & praise to You for generous giving that allows us the ability to help meet the needs of those we are blessed to serve.**

Each village we bring food to seems to have its' own personality. Some villages are quietly patient as they wait in their socially distanced spaces to receive. Other villages give a sense of semi-organized chaos as people enjoy having the opportunity to catch up with others outside of the walls of their home. Some villages you tangibly feel the joy & excitement as they await to receive much needed sustenance for their families, these are the villages that as we pray together before we start, there will be collaborative loud praises & hands reaching up to Father God in thanks....my favorite. Then there are the villages where the hunger, heaviness, fear & desperation has taken hold; they ignore repeated requests to distance because by doing so someone will step in front of them. There is sometimes pushing forward because it will bring them closer to the food. As time without work and without food marches forward, I can say, this is going to be the reality we see in each village, getting to the point it may be too unsafe to do the distributions, where we will need to drop the food at a secure location and trust the leaders to distribute fairly. We are seeing reports of humanitarian vehicles being hijacked for the food and fear turning into crowds of anger when food runs out. There are just so many in need & though we fight every day to meet the needs God has placed in our hands, it just is so incredibly great. No matter how much we pre-plan the distributions with the village president or leader, for a specified number of persons, LOTS of others come in hopes there will somehow be more than we say we have & can physically fit in the truck. Loaves and fishes, fishes and loaves..... I pray for that miracle every.... single.... time. We sometimes have a few extra bags that appear from our carefully calculated numbers, but the reality is, perhaps our collective faith in fishes & loaves miracles isn't sufficient....there just is not enough to go around. We need more people giving what they can, more people praying in miraculous faith, more people believing that God's got the fishes and loaves miracle waiting for us! **Father God, we pray for peace & provision for all of your children as we struggle to understand what is happening during these incredibly trying times. We pray our mustard seed faith can sprout into a loaves and fishes miracle!**

We will continue to buy, package & deliver whatever is funded! Keep it coming! Lives literally depend on your generosity.

Guatemala continues to be on stay at home orders: we have graduated to a 6pm to 5am curfew (it was 4am to 4pm); however we got surprised by the presidential order for complete lockdown on weekends starting at 6pm on Thursday through 5 am on Monday over the past 3 weekends. The president also stated that if cases per day rise above 500 he would likely implement a 15 day complete lockdown! I can't even fathom that. People can barely make it through the weekend without having the ability to get out daily to scavenge for water, food & firewood. The reality is, those that had day to day jobs that got them a handful of tortillas to survive, don't have that job anymore. Those that had jobs in tourism related businesses....that is shut down and gone. Those that survived off the generosity of family, neighbors and friends when times got hard, everyone is tapped out, there are no more life-lines left. Hard life is so much harder. 8 weeks ago, grocery store lines were hours in the wait to get in, everyone was using what little resources they had to stock up. Now, the stores are nearly empty, demonstrating that people have ran out of resources to spend. The initial efforts by the president to contain the virus helped to slow down the spread,

but the reality is, it is no longer contained. The spread has intensified by people that can no longer continue to survive without work or food by staying home and hiding. I fear the pressure cooker feeling I have been sensing over the past few weeks is at its' blowing point. People are starting to defy the stay at home & curfew laws. Some towns are under martial law, with military lock down for doing so. **Lord have mercy, hear our pleas for Your manna to rain down and feed the hungry. We pray for Your miraculous protection from the enemy in the form of a virus & starvation.** The economy has collapsed and the medical system which was edgy to begin with collapsed long- long ago, when cases were growing by less than 20 per day....we are now seeing 300-400 cases per day. **Father we pray for the overcrowded hospitals & ill patients, we pray for the doctors & medical workers that are tending to quadrupled caseloads with no medicine or equipment.** We ask that you join us in praying for & partnering financially with ministries on the ground fighting for God's kingdom to be able to meet needs that are tremendous & overwhelming. **We thank you Father that the needs are not too tremendous for You. Thanks be to You, oh Lord, the majority of us reading this newsletter do not need to worry where our next meal will possibly come from.**

Though we have managed to stay healthy and keep going, we are feeling the effects of the physical & emotional work we do. We are really needing your prayers to help us to be discerning with decisions we need to make regarding when to come back to the states for rest & family time. Even though we could find a repatriation flight back to Minnesota, with the borders closed for re-entry, we will not be able to return until the president of Guatemala opens the borders. We want to know we can return to resume ministry before leaving, but we also don't want that to be the only reason we stay longer than we should. Please pray that we continue to be protected as we serve amongst the virus as well as with the potential danger associated with people in desperation. Pray that the mission home can continue to be a place of peace and safety. Pray for safety in navigating around the country and safety in leaving if we are called to. I repeat, as I shared in our last update, this is a pivotal time as followers of Jesus to respond like Jesus to the circumstances and world around us. May we find ourselves passionately and wholeheartedly being HIS CHURCH and being the best possible representatives of JESUS CHRIST! **We give praise & thanks to You Father God, for Your love and goodness! May we faithfully and wholeheartedly pursue You! All God's people said: AMEN!**

That's Just Peachy!



5 weeks ago, we started going to a small village to buy peaches from several women that are dependent upon the annual peach harvest for their annual income. With travel not permitted between departments, no public bussing & market restrictions they cannot sell their peaches in the local markets. Every week Perlita & I go and purchase 10-13 crates of peaches for around \$125. We work to sell as many as we can to women in Antigua that like peaches and want to support the cause in order to recoup as much of the cost of the peaches, occasionally earning a few extra Quetzales that get donated back to the women we bought from. The majority of the peaches get donated to families around the mission home, to ministries that care for disabled adults and children and to a community organization that gives hot meals each day to around 200 people. A few weeks ago a donor gave the funds needed to support

2 weeks' worth of the peach purchases. She knew how much time I was spending trying to sell peaches & desired that for a few weeks, the peaches simply be dropped off for donations! This gave me a much needed break & blessed a lot more people with peaches. Bless her heart!

Aside from helping these women with a small source of income for their work, we have developed friendships with them and have been blessed to pray over them. It is my desire that in the near future, we can start a bible study course with them. Please pray with me about that!

As the peach harvest comes to an end we are trying to buy as much as we can to not let them go to waste. God opened another door to use the peaches to help in another way. He connected us with a small family business that is struggling to get their artisanal yogurt sold and distributed due to COVID. Part of their process is making marmalade with local fruits to flavor their yogurt. They freeze the marmalades if they have an abundance. We worked with them and invented a peach cobbler marmalade yogurt that is selling quite well! Any of the proceeds from sales will go directly into buying more emergency COVID food for the village the peaches came from.







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