

South American Call, Inc..

History

I am sitting in a crowd of some 3,000 in a stadium in Riobamba, Ecuador. It is June, 1999 and I am just six weeks out of my pastorate of twelve years at Union City, Tennessee. In a move that most people would consider a giant leap of faith, but to me was just simply doing what I believed was God's will for my life, I had taken on the title of "full time missionary." Now something more awesome than I could ever have imagined was about to happen and this would only be the beginning. As I look around me my mind goes back to my childhood. I remembered working in the cotton fields of West Carroll Parish. I remembered following along behind a plow being pulled by what daddy had called a "split team"; one horse and one mule. I remembered the dreams and aspirations of my youth, but none of them included this scene that was spread before me. This was my first major crusade to the people of South America. I would not be preaching it, but I knew that somehow God had used me to bring this all together. I felt very humbled and unworthy.

As I sat there I remembered rumbling along in that old worn out bus hitting hole after hole on the way to the stadium that night. I had struggled with the powers of the enemy on that ride as Satan came against me in a desperate attempt to stop the gospel message from going forth. He had said to me, "No one is coming to your crusade tonight. What are you going to tell Charles Oaks that you did with his money? You're going to be a failure! This is it! This is the end of your ministry!"

Charles Oaks was the minister who had put up the \$5,000.00 for this crusade. The words rang loud in my spirit. But immediately the Spirit of the living God spoke to me stronger than I had ever heard him. He said, "That is a lie of the Devil. This is going to be a success. You are to sit back, relax and enjoy this. It will be a success."

Brother Mike Cleghorn preached a great message that night, as always, but when he began to give the altar call, no one responded. NO ONE! But he didn't give up. I learned something about altar calls that night. Rev. Doug Graham of Memphis would finish teaching me that lesson several years later. After several minutes had passed, one man showed up at the altar to be saved. I thought about it for a minute. Five thousand dollars for one soul. It costs more than that in the states. Rev. Oaks' money was not wasted, I thought. There is no price to be placed on a soul. But it was not over. I looked around and more were coming. Before that night was over more than one hundred fifty souls had been won into the kingdom of God. I could face Oaks now. But before that week was over almost two thousand adults gave their lives to Jesus.

On Saturday of that week I saw 11,000 kids come into that stadium to see the drama that Kay Workman had prepared. I watched in disbelief as the children packed into that sports stadium. The gospel message went forth under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. I was told that five thousand asked Jesus into their heart that day. I would never be the

same! There was no going back! I had been a very avid fisherman and sport pilot, but after that day catching a six or seven pound bass or flying an airplane just sort of lost its thrill. Winning 5,000 souls, young souls for Jesus Christ was the hands down winner!

Actually, this story started back in the mid 90's. I will never forget that night. Missionary Bryan Hersey did an excellent job of presenting the needs of the Quechua Indians in the area of Ambato, Ecuador. I watched with much skepticism as Bryan did his presentation. Quite honestly, I thought that it was just a very well prepared presentation. I did not believe it came from the heart. But the next day as he and I were riding along in the car I saw tears roll down his face as he talked about the children of MiTambo Orphanage. At that point I did a rethink of his performance the night before. Maybe, I thought, this man just might be for real.

Over the next few years my church (Union City Church of God; Union City, TN) did several projects for Bryan. We tried to do whatever he asked. He would come by once or twice a year. Although I did not know what was happening, God was cultivating my heart and preparing me for something greater than I could ever have imagined. He was preparing me for full-time mission work in places I did not even know existed.

After several years of working with Bryan I decided to work with another missionary. I felt I had worked in Ecuador long enough and that the church needed a change. I brought a missionary in from Africa and he spoke at my church. But it just wasn't God's will for me. The change didn't take place.

The ministry to Ecuador seemed to have a mind of its own. It went if I worked at it. It went if I didn't work at it. It just would not die. Then Bryan started trying to get me to go to Ecuador with him. I certainly didn't want to

go. There was a man in my church by the name of Leroy Neil who said he would go, so we raised the money for his trip. At the last minute he decided not to go and I had to take his place.

I wasn't looking forward to the trip and hated it once I got there. I counted the days until I could get back to the good ole USA. I told them that they could write it on the wall that the "Fat Boy" would not be back. But little did I know that God was doing a work in my heart and that, in fact, I would be back many times.

The next year I took a group to Ecuador to build a church in a place called Llullulo. I still remember a young boy from my church, Nathan Stewart, being chased around by a little Quichua Indian girl who had a crush on him. It was on this trip that the children's ministry began. Kay Workman took some cloth to make a flannelgraph board and taught sixty or seventy children about Jesus Christ. Many of these children accepted Jesus as Lord. WOW! What can I say? More people accepted the Lord that week than I had seen saved in a year at my local church. My heart was changing, but I did not know it.

I didn't intend to go back again. I really didn't. But something had happened in my heart. God was taking control of my direction more and more. I put a large poster on the wall at church that said, "Through the help of God we made it (the trip to Ecuador) and if God wills, we can do it again!" At the time I did not know just how true that was.

Two years later we loaded up again and went back. From that time on we would be going to South America every year. We would soon be going several times a year. I began going into other churches to raise money for various projects. By late 1998 I was expending more energy on missions than I was on pastoring. You see, God had given my heart to missions.

The ministry was growing and by 1998 the handwriting was on the wall.

Along the way we picked up some medical ministry. Dr. Rod Dunham began to travel with me. He was wonderful with the people who needed help. Charlotte Nichols began to do dental work with us. Then Dr. Steve Graham began to help in the dental work. Our range of ministry was expanding.

By late 1998 I was feeling much pressure to go full time in missions. I talked to the "POWERS THAT BE" at Church of God World Missions about going full time, but they were not supportive. They said that I should not do it. But as I left the World Missions offices I called Rev. Roland Vaughn who was overseer of South America. God had caused our paths to cross some months earlier. I told him that I had to do it; I had to go full time. I told him that I could not go to my grave not knowing whether this was God leading me or not. I told him I would do it and that if World Missions wanted to stop me they would just have to, "pull my ticket." He told me to go ahead and do what God had placed on my heart. He did not believe that World Missions would try to stop me.

A very brief look at my finances would have told any sensible person that I was not financially able to go full time in missions. Some of my associates told me that I should not do it. It did not make sense for me to do it. But I could not say "no" to that voice inside of me that kept saying, GO!

I knew that I would have to have a little more money up front if I were to have any chance of succeeding. I had a man in my church who had been very supportive of me in times past. Through various circumstances God had forged a very special bond between him and me. He had, at times, given large sums of money to help with various projects. So I talked to him one day and told him what I

planned to do. I asked him for \$2,000.00 on which to begin this ministry. As always, he came through for me. He did not do it reluctantly, but made me feel that he was very happy to donate this money to the ministry. His name is Jerry Thompson and he still is there for me when I need him. In fact, he recently donated \$5,000.00 to the building of "Miss Sophie", a houseboat to be used in ministry on the Amazon River. His original \$2,000.00 was used to begin a very fruitful ministry. As always, Jerry got his money's worth. Thousands have received the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and every time the boat goes down the river, he will have a part in the souls that are saved. Thanks, Jerry.

On the last Sunday of May, 1999, I walked out of the pulpit for the last time as pastor. Judy and I moved to Carthage, Tennessee. A very good friend of mine, Rev. Richard Blackburn, was pastoring there and offered to help me move and locate close to his church. His help was greatly needed and his friendship during that time was wonderful. By the time Judy and I got located in Carthage we were broke. We had no money. We had no furniture. It began to look like I had made a mistake.

But God had a pastor waiting to help. I was scheduled to be with Rev. Richard Hackett on a Sunday night shortly after we arrived in Carthage. I didn't know what size church he had and I didn't ask. He invited me to come and I went. On the way out there I told Judy that if we did not get a substantial offering that night we would have to go to work and make a living. I was thinking that this was the end. When we arrived there only eight people showed up for service. I'll never forget it. I told my wife that it was over. I apologized to her for getting us into this mess and then went in the pulpit and did the best I knew how to do. I had no hope. But when he announced

the amount of the offering I could not believe it. It was over \$540.00! That night Rev. Hackett listened to God and saved this ministry. To God be the glory. He continues to be a very good friend and contributor to this day.

Six weeks after leaving the pastorate I was in the crusade I mentioned earlier in RioBamba, Ecuador. Strangely enough, during that crusade God spoke to my heart to go to Peru. I had left my pastorate in Union City to work the rest of my life in Ecuador, but the voice of God was unmistakable; Peru was to be my next mission.

Upon going into Peru we met Rev. Seidel Chavez who was Territorial Supervisor for the Church of God in Huaraz. He and I would team up with another man by the name of Rev. E.L. Turner from North Carolina to give strength and encouragement to the church in this area. I thought that this would finally be the place where I would work until God was finished with me. We did crusades, built churches, bought a \$45,000.00 piece of property, built a multi-purpose ministry building along with a large parsonage. Thousands were saved and many children in remote villages were taught the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The time spent in Huaraz was very successful.

Not long after I went to Huaraz where I once again thought I would stay until I retired, I met a man by the name of Lorenzo Jimenez. He was territorial supervisor for almost half of Peru. About this same time one of my board members, Dick Bevil, called me to tell me that he had a burden for Iquitos, Peru. Another man called me to tell me that God had burdened him to build a church in the jungle. Once again South American Call was about to change directions. But this time the change would be very dramatic. We were headed for the largest river in the world; the

mighty Amazon! But it would be several months before I would know for sure about this change in direction.

In January, 2003, Jack Bowen, one of my board members, met with Rev. Jimenez and was very impressed with him. So in March of that year we extended a trip to include Huanaco where Jimenez lived. When I got off the plane I knew that I was supposed to be there. I listened as Lorenzo told me of the people who needed Jesus, but because of a lack of funds he was unable to do the ministry that was needed. I was very moved, to say the least.

I left Peru with very mixed emotions. When I arrived back home I knew that I had to go back. I met Lorenzo in Lima and we boarded a plane for Iquitos. This is the largest city in the world that is inaccessible by road. It sits on the banks of the Amazon River; the largest river in the world. When I stepped on the ground there I knew that something special was happening. I knew that this city would be in my future. I didn't have the details, but everything in me sensed that I was here for a very special reason.

They took me out onto the river and into the jungle. I was at peace with the world. The little boat slipped through tight places where bushes were rubbing both sides of the boat. I liked it. I felt at home. Antonio, the district overseer, asked me how I liked jungle. I told him that it reminded me of my home state of Louisiana. In fact, the jungle is very much like the swamps of southern Louisiana. I remembered that I had asked God not to send me to the jungle. I don't know why I prayed that prayer, but God knew that I would love it. Aren't you glad that God answers our prayers in conjunction with His wisdom?

Over the next few months I learned a lot about this area. I learned that there were 32,000 villages in the Amazon Jungle that

have no church at all. I learned that there are thousands who have never heard the name of Jesus. Once again, my life had changed direction. I was going down the river. I had no choice. Just like when God spoke to me to leave my pastorate in Union City; just like God had spoken to me to leave Ecuador and go to Peru; He was speaking to me again to go in yet another direction.

I began to look at how I could best get ready for this new phase of this ministry. I found that the jungle is inaccessible by road. The only way to get there is by boat. The river is over 4,000 miles long. A small boat would not be sufficient. I would need a boat of about sixty five feet in length and twenty feet in width. That would be sufficient size to house twenty two people and stay down-river for a month or more. We would need a water purification system on board so we could use the river water. Having to carry enough water for 20-30 people would greatly reduce the time you could stay away from port. We would need a walk-in cooler and freezer so we could carry sufficient food with us. We would need a dental office on board so that we would do some humanitarian work among the people. That was the plan.

We would plant Master Churches along the river. We would teach, train and support these pastors with the hope of giving them the ability to reach deep into the jungle where the gospel message has never been preached; 32,000 villages with no church at all. We would build high speed hovercraft to allow the district pastor to reach all the churches in a reasonable amount of time. It seemed an impossible task, but I knew that God was more than able to bring it to pass.

We began raising money for the boat. We would call her "Miss Sophie". I finally estimated that I would need at least \$200,000.00 to get this project operational.

The fund raising began and turned out to be a painfully slow process. Ministry was ongoing, of course.

And then the unthinkable happened. I made a down payment of \$45,000.00 to a boat company in Manaus, Brazil. Little did I know that the owner was about to fold the company and leave town. I finally faced the facts of the loss in December of 2004. It was devastating. It was without a doubt the lowest time of my life. I tried to quit, but God would not let me. I cried and prayed and could not see any way to move forward.

After weeks of this, one day God helped me to look at what I had instead of what I had lost. I still had money to build churches. I had much of the material already purchased for the project. I had a sawmill. And God reminded me that I had told him that I would do this ministry as long as He financed it. I could not stop. I believed that I would make a complete fool of myself, but I was bound by my word to move forward.

God gave me a plan to start raising the money again. I was amazed by the love I received from the ministers who had given me money for the boat; ministers whose money I had lost. It was a very humbling experience.

We are now at about \$80,000.00 in money and pledges. We thought we might find a used boat, but have not been able to do so. I will not buy a boat that will not do the job. That would be a waste. As I type this today I am still waiting for God to provide the rest of the money for what will be the greatest ministry I have ever experienced.

As the days go by I will update this article. I invite those who read it to contact me if you have any suggestions as to how to get on the river earlier. It is my desire to do the will of God in the ministry along the Amazon. Pray for us. We need it.

SEPTEMBER 26, 2007

Well, it has been approximately two years since I have updated our history. It is time that I do so.

I wish I could tell you that we have our boat in hand and working, but that is not the case. Since I last updated our history I have indeed bought a boat in Brazil. She is a fine piece of marine equipment. We named her "Senorita Sophie" after a little girl in Hauraz, Peru. She is the first child I saw when we decided to start a soup kitchen there.

We got a good buy on the boat. It is all aluminum and in very good shape. The engine and rudder system needed a little maintenance and we supplied that. It is very fuel efficient and could have been very useful to us.

The boat is completely paid for and I have a clear title to her. However, the Brazilian government will not let me bring her into Peru to stay without an exorbitant amount of taxes and an equal amount of tax by Peru. The total would be close to \$100,000.00. I hired what was supposed to be one of the best lawyers in Brazil, but all to no avail. I have spent thousands of dollars trying to get her out of Brazil.

No one knew how difficult this would be at the time I bought the boat. People who had done this same basic thing before told me that it could be done if I would just be patient. Once I was told that all that was needed was for me to come to Tabatinga, Brazil, and sign some papers and it would be over with. I left the States for Lima and picked up another flight into Iquitos. I booked passage on a

speed boat from Iquitos to Brazil. The boat ride was an all day event.

Tabatinga is not a place I would choose to visit, given the choice. It is a very dangerous place. Even the native people don't go out there after dark. There is drug running, smuggling and general lawlessness in the area. I did not have a good interpreter with me, but on the way there God provided one. That was unbelievable.

I arrived in Tabatinga in the late afternoon and by the next afternoon I had all the papers signed. They told me that it was over. The boat would be leaving Brazil in a matter of hours. I felt that the trip had been worth the effort and I was very happy about it as I left for the all day boat ride back to Iquitos.

By the time I got back to the States things had already changed. The boat would not leave like it was promised. Time and again I was told this is it, but all to no avail. Finally, I decided that it was futile to pursue this course. I have placed the boat up for sale. I believe I can recover most of the money we paid for her.

Now might be a good time to explain why I went to Brazil in the first place to buy a boat. It really is very simple. You can buy a better boat in Brazil; much, much better. "Sophie" was all aluminum; lighter, faster, more fuel efficient, less maintenance, less corrosion, etc. She is better designed than the boats in Peru. These are facts... no question about it. Brazil has better boats!

But all of this is a learning process. There were many lessons/things I needed to learn. The only way to get this education was to dive in and make the mistakes. I have done

the very best I know how to do. And, we are still doing great ministry on the Amazon.

We are chartering a boat; El Arca. She is a beauty and will sleep about 35 total in air-conditioned sleeping quarters, plus we have an air-conditioned doctor's office. She is fast by river standards and has an excellent crew. Even though we have not been able to use our own boat, the ministry is going ahead at a very good pace.

We are doing several trips a year and winning many people to Jesus. Here is what a typical trip looks like now. We leave the States on Monday and arrive in Iquitos the following morning about 8:30. By nine or ten that morning (Tuesday) we are on the boat. We usually sail most of the night and wake up in the village (Wednesday morning) where we will work for the next two days.

On a normal trip now we will work in 2 or 3 villages. Here is the routine. The first day we will begin early in the morning with several projects. First of all is the water well drilling. It will take us about 2 days most times to complete the well. This is a win, win. We are building relationships with these people. We work side by side with them in order to give them something they do not have; fresh, clean drinking water. While the water well drilling is going on other activities are taking place. We provide medical, dental, chiropractic services and give away eye glasses. Early the first morning we put people out in the village to tell them that we have free medical care on the boat. Soon a line forms for these services. While this is going on we begin to do children's ministries; flannelgraph, drama and just plain fun. By noon the first day souls are already finding Jesus as Lord.

One of the great miracles is that many adults come to Jesus during the children's ministry. The drama is just perfect. It is on both the level of the children and the adults. We are seeing village chiefs saved in these dramas.

On the first night we show the first of two videos; "The God Story." This is the story of the Bible. It teaches them who God is and what the Bible is. It begins at Genesis and goes all the way through to eternal life for the saved and eternal damnation for the lost. It is very effective. Usually, we have more people accept the Lord following the first video.

On the second day we continue to do the same thing; water well, medical, glasses, children's ministry, etc. We are literally putting our arms around the village to build a relationship with them. They all have more knowledge of God the second day because of the dramas and the video of the first day. That evening we have a signing ceremony to sign over the ownership of the well to the Chief and his successors forever. Most of the village will come for that ceremony. Following that we have an evangelistic service. Again, people come to the Lord.

The last afternoon we baptize anyone who has received Christ and wishes to take that step. Following that we do the last video as soon as it is dark enough. This video is the "Jesus Video". This is a dramatization of the book of Luke. And, once again, people come forward to receive Jesus.

After a few "good bye's" we board the boat for an all night ride to the next village. The ride is smooth and easy. The food is good. The fellowship is wonderful and the rewards are eternal.

God is opening doors daily. I never believed that I could raise enough money to charter a boat several times a year to do this, but God is doing it. My plans at this time are to continue using the chartered boat until I can sell Sophie and buy, build or re-build a boat in Peru.

One thing of note here is that I have learned a lot about what I really need in a boat for missions. I have learned a lot about how to do this. We are getting better and better at this. I need cash flow. If I had enough money I would move to Iquitos and set this ministry in place with several boats operating regularly on the river.

We are at a place now where more is about to be added to the ministry program. We are getting ready now to begin the follow up program which will include a new high-speed hovercraft for visiting the villages and a school for training the pastors and workers. To God be the glory and honor and praise for it all.