

Praying the promises

I've just had one of the most precious experiences of my life. A couple weeks ago I returned from a mission visit with Pastor Oscar and his wife Leonor in Honduras. Pastor Oscar is a hard man not to admire. When I walked into their home, I noticed that most of the living room furniture I saw last year was gone. It turns out that their church's sound system has been stolen. So they are holding a church bazaar to raise money to replace the sound system. Oscar and Leonor gave away their living room furniture to the bazaar.

Their church in Honduras strongly believes in "praying the promises" of Scripture. And not only praying them, but proclaiming them into the heavens, and believing them—standing firm in their truth.

Interestingly for me, this was the very thing the Lord had been teaching me the past few months. In particular, I had been experimenting with declaring out loud the Scripture promises about my identity, who I am in Christ. I would re-write Scripture promises in the first person and "own them" as applying to me. Like these: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," "I am a son of God," "I am one in whom Christ dwells," "I am filled with the Spirit," "I am an ambassador for Christ," "I am strong in the Lord," "I am the righteousness of Christ," "I am loved in the Beloved," "I am delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God's dear Son," "I tread on snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy. Nothing of the evil one will harm me." And so on.

Pastor Oscar's church does this very thing, and while in their presence, I found myself inspired to stand strong by praying Biblical promises directed to me as a disciple of Jesus. Honduran people love Americans, but the country itself is not completely safe. Armed guards with shotguns stand in front of almost every small and large store—whether a bank, a grocery store, or a Wendy's. Kidnapping is not an uncommon occurrence, if you are known to be wealthy. The lady who lives in the house across the street from Pastor Oscar was kidnapped and held for ransom for two months.

Added to fear of possible harm was my usual nervousness of "What if I get sick?" or "What if our car breaks down?" or "Will my ministry be effective?" But as I began to follow Oscar and Leonor's example of praying the promises, such as, "No weapon formed against me shall prosper," (Isa 54:17)



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and "God has not given me a spirit of fear, but a Spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind," (2 Tim 1:7) I discovered to my pleasant surprise that I did not experience a trace of fear. Isn't this what we all need, really? Not only to be delivered from harm, but also the FEAR of harm?

Many of things Jesus said about BELIEVING in prayer have bewildered me over the years. He would say things like, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer," (Mt 21:22) and "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (Mk 11:24) I've never doubted what Jesus taught—I've just not quite known how to practice it myself. But something happened along these lines our last night in Honduras I will never forget.

Pastor Oscar had invited me to preach at their Sunday night service. All week long we had been attending a large youth conference in San Pedro Sula, "Extreme por Christo," from early morning till late at night. Frankly, I was worn out. So Sunday afternoon, I took a nap. As I began to fall asleep, I found myself praying. A sentence came to mind, "Signs and wonders accompany My Word." "OK," I said to myself, "I'll believe for that," and silently began to repeat it as a prayer. When I woke up, I knew I was to anoint with oil anyone who wished for prayer for healing after the service. I called Pastor Oscar, who said he had anointing oil somewhere, and that he would bring it to the service.

His congregation meets in the town of Yoro, in the central highlands of Honduras, a town of about 20,000 people, with mostly dirt roads and small (and by our standards, poor) homes. That Sunday night there were probably 50 people in attendance, mostly women, a few men, and including a bunch of kids. The service began with a wonderful time of praising God and singing. Then it was time for the sermon. Pastor Oscar

translated as I preached a message of finding inner rest through Jesus. During the preaching, I had the sense that while the people were listening politely, it was not one of my better sermons! Closing out the sermon, I said something along these lines: "If you would like to be anointed with oil and prayed over for healing, I would be deeply honored to do so. I am not very good at altar calls and I do not believe in manipulating people. But I'm going to pray for you and when I finish, feel free to come forward for prayer if you would like."

I prayed, then opened my eyes, and about a third of the congregation was there standing in front of me. Pastor Oscar formed them into three lines. One by one, we anointed each by forming the sign of the cross on their foreheads, placed our hands on them and quietly prayed. Words came to mind which I then began to speak out, which Pastor Oscar translated. These words were along the lines of "This one will now sleep well," "She is healed in Jesus' name," "Be strong in the Lord and His mighty power," "You are set free from all evil." I noticed that as we prayed many, not all, but many began to weep. It was clear that something good was happening. When we finished slowly praying through those three lines of people, I looked and three more lines had formed behind them! So we continued to anoint with oil and pray. We were finished, or so I thought. I looked behind me and two rows of small children were standing waiting for prayer. So we knelt, anointed with oil, and prayed. It was, I think, the most tender, loving, and special time of ministry I've ever had the privilege of being a part of.

But what happened then, I will never forget. Leonor, Pastor Oscar's wife, came up to him and told him about one of the women we had prayed for. This dear lady had a tumor under her arm, near her breast, which was scheduled to be removed by surgery. Earlier that day she had checked and the tumor was there. She told Leonor that as we prayed, she felt something in her body, and discovered that the tumor had gone. Oscar told me this with rejoicing. Tears came to my eyes, and I too praised the Lord.

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