



## *Gospel Literature Impacts Lives*

*by Gene and Jean Easley*

### **Sumpango**

There was a long detour on the main highway going to Sumpango, an Indian village in the highlands of south central Guatemala. A trip that would ordinarily have taken an hour and a half took about three hours. After traveling up and down hilly terrain and over rough, dirt roads, and finally arriving in Sumpango, we were greeted by a downpour of torrential rains. The missionary I was traveling with needed to meet with the pastor of a local church in Sumpango.

It was a short visit--only a few minutes of business--and we were ready to return to Guatemala City. On our departure from Sumpango, we had an experience that forever put this small town on the map of my memories.

Most of the streets in this town were not paved, and those that were had large potholes making travel extremely difficult. We were in a small pick-up truck, and the bad streets slowed us almost to a crawl. Our departure from Sumpango must not have been at a speed of more than five miles per hour. This slow speed, though adding to the torture of the trip, provided a unique opportunity for the Gospel.

While the driver was trying to miss the large potholes, I could distribute literature to the townspeople! I, literally, had my arms extended out the passenger side of the truck giving Gospel literature to those walking and standing along the sidewalks of main street Sumpango.

I was amazed by what I saw and very moved by it. Many of the recipients of the literature had been simply standing in front of the little store front buildings, gazing about, or just watching others pass by. They seemed unoccupied and bored. The sight of someone distributing free literature aroused great interest. One by one, the people would walk or even run over to our truck to receive their share. As they took the literature with a big, "Gracias (thank you)," they returned to their places or continued their journeys along the sidewalks. But in either case, they instantly began to read the literature.

It was a very moving experience because the literature was full of Scripture and full of the Gospel message. We know that reading Scripture in itself has no saving power, but the Word of God is alive. Those who read it automatically give the Holy Spirit a tool to work with to reach to the depths of their hearts and turn them to God.

We may not take experiences like this seriously in America where literature is plentiful and easily available. But in third-world countries where the average person in the poor class can hardly afford to buy a newspaper, literature is a valuable commodity. I have witnessed uniformed policemen reading their new New Testaments (given to them as we passed through customs) out loud so that all passers-by were getting a little of the greatest story ever told, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They were not in the least ashamed or inhibited to let everyone know they were thrilled to receive their personal copy of the Word of God!

### **Guatemalan Border**

One of the most difficult parts of our journeys to Guatemala has always been at the Mexico/Guatemala border and the anxiety-filled passage through Guatemalan customs. It is almost always like a nightmare from which one longs to awaken. On one such crossing, our nightmare was turned into a special time of blessing through the use of Gospel literature.

Leaving Mexico is a simple procedure. You turn in your visas, your papers for your automobile, and one last serious look by the Mexican officials and you are on your way out of Mexico and into the beautiful little country of Guatemala. Guatemala is about the size of the state of Ohio. But its diversity of topography, mountains, lowlands and jungles, plus its primitive highway system, make it appear to be more like the size of Texas than Ohio.

However, your first view of Guatemala, as you enter on the southwest corner, is not memorable because of its beauty. As you arrive at the border crossing, you are commanded to park your car and get

out. Young men or sometimes boys will meet you and offer their services to expedite your adventure through the customs office.

The first stop is to have your car sprayed with some sort of insecticide which is supposed to rid your vehicle of all the bugs you picked up in Mexico. When you leave Guatemala, they go through the same procedure in Mexico to exterminate the Guatemalan bugs before entering Mexico. We don't know if these sprays have any real power on the bugs, but it does bring a little more revenue to the local government. So one just learns to tolerate the unpleasant odor.

After having your car sprayed, your guide will take you to several more stops before you actually reach the customs office. The police station will want to register your name and passport number and, of course, there is another fee for doing this. After that you will go to several different windows where you usually have little idea what they are doing, but each time a little more money is required. By this time you should have already changed some of your American dollars into Guatemalan Quetzals. This is usually taken care of between the two borders.

When you finally reach the customs officer, his first remark is that you must remove everything from your vehicle and take it inside the customs office for inspection. Immediately, you begin trying to talk him out of doing such an impossible task. Sometimes it works; sometimes it isn't that easy. But to describe this whole ordeal as a nightmare is to put it mildly.

It was at this point in the process where having a large supply of Gospel literature made one border crossing a blessing that we could never forget. For some reason, that time it wasn't as difficult to convince the inspector that our van was too full and that it would not be practical to unload everything and carry it into the building. He agreed to let us leave most of it in the van where he would inspect it. Of course, he insisted that we still give the customary tips to himself and the men with him who would have otherwise helped us carry all those items into the building.

He did require that we empty some things from the back of the van and stack them on the pavement behind the van. This was our opportunity to unload several boxes of Bibles and New Testaments. Then, our normally gloomy day became a time of joy and excitement.

As I followed the customs inspector, Jean sat with the boxes of literature and began giving some to passers-by. Very soon, she became the center of attention for all who were crossing the border. Everyone wanted a Bible or New Testament. The New Testaments were a specially-marked edition with a chain reference for many salvation Scriptures. The salvation Scriptures were highlighted with a bright color.

At the top of the page where the salvation Scripture appeared was a Scripture reference telling you where to find the next salvation Scripture. Several of the more well-known salvation passages were referenced. My wife began to show the people how to find these salvation verses. Of course, she was distributing so many pieces that she could not show the technique to all. Soon, however, we noticed that the people sitting on the benches in front of the customs building were themselves, showing others how to find those special verses! Praise God!

Most of the people crossing that border and receiving their personal Bibles were of the peasant class--they were a humble people who had never known anything but the hardness of life. To see their faces light up and then watch them sitting and reading God's Word was a thrill to our souls! Such a tremendous blessing rests upon the Word of God that when it is allowed to enter not only the heart but even a public place, the chains of darkness must flee!

The Spirit of that place changed from the normal spirit of misery and mistrust to the spirit of a revival center! All around, people were sitting reading their new Bibles; others were standing against the building with Bibles opened, captivated by what they were reading. Faces began to smile which had not smiled before. New friends were being made as strangers began discussing what they were finding in God's Word. For a brief span of time, the powers of darkness that normally dominate that place were broken, and God was honored.

We had some difficulty leaving the border that day. But it wasn't because the customs officials held us longer than normal. The people were wanting to talk with us and ask questions about the Bible and the Lord. There seemed to be a reaching out of their souls for more of what God alone can offer. Though, we don't know all that took place in the lives of those who received the literature that day, we do know God's Word will not return unto Him void.

## **Mazatenango**

Mazatenango is one of the larger cities along the southern route from the border with Mexico to Guatemala City. Its noisy streets are crowded with people, and a spirit of evil pervades the atmosphere. Sinful living and crime is the norm, and Americans are usually eager to pass through the place as quickly as possible. But in the midst of the degradation and evil are humble people whose hearts are reaching out for help.

There is a Pollo Campero (country chicken--a large fast-food chain restaurant in Guatemala) in Mazatenango. This is one of the few restaurants in which we have confidence enough to eat on this highway to our destination. So we usually stop to buy some hot food, which we seldom can enjoy on our long trip from the American border to Guatemala City. Most of our eating during the rest of the trip is from cans and dry goods.

On one trip, we stopped at this Pollo Campero at about noonday. Our car was loaded with all that we could bring with us for our stay in Guatemala. Since it is extremely unsafe to leave your car unguarded in Guatemala, especially when it is packed, I stayed in the car while Jean went inside the restaurant to buy two "Menu Camperos" to take to eat along the way.

As I sat there waiting for her to return, a young boy about twelve years old approached the car. He was begging, a very common sight in Guatemala. I gave him some change and then reached over and picked up a small booklet of Gospel literature and gave it to the boy. He was thankful, took his gifts and dashed back across the street.

A few minutes later, he came back. This time he had a young friend with him, another young boy about the same age. I figured they wanted to take full advantage of the presence of this American. I thought surely the little friend was going to ask for his share of the American's money. But when he arrived at the car, he didn't ask for money. He wanted one of the booklets, which I gladly gave him.

Multitudes of people were walking up and down the sidewalk near where I was parked. Some happened to see me giving the literature to the boys. Soon others came cautiously over and asked if they could have one of the books. I gladly gave them booklets, too.

When others passing by saw me giving the literature away, they, too, came over. Within the span of about two or three minutes, I had a crowd of people gathered around my car--all wanting free literature. There was a constant flow of hands, a dozen or so at a time, reaching inside my car window wanting something of their own. In addition to the small booklets, I had a small supply of Bibles and New Testaments in the back seat of the car. As quickly as I could, I continued putting literature into the multitude of hands reaching inside the car. As fast as I could, I gave the Word of God to hungry people!

One woman, particularly, stood out above all the rest. She was standing at the front side of my door, reaching her arm around and into the window. She was an Indian woman from one of the many tribes in Guatemala. What caught my attention was the expression on her face. Her very countenance sent forth a cry for help. She looked as if she had never received anything free in all her life. The hopelessness expressed in her face said to me that she had suffered so much loss and rejection in life that she could scarcely believe that something good could happen to her. What a joy I felt when I placed a Bible in her hands! Her smile of thankfulness made being a missionary worthwhile all over again! The hard trip and the constant dangers seemed a little price to pay to see that woman receive a copy of the Word of God.

When we drove away from Mazatenango with our chicken dinners, we were already refreshed, not from the hot meal, but from a new visitation of joy that God dipped into our hearts for allowing us to be a part of getting His Word to a few more people!

## **Tapachula**

Tapachula is a beautiful border city at the very southern tip of Mexico, as it borders with the country of Guatemala. It lies on the lowland about 15 miles from the southern coast of Mexico. A memorable sight in Tapachula is its Central Plaza in downtown, in which the caretakers beautify the Plaza by trimming the hedge-like trees flat on top and in a myriad of shapes. The trunks of the trees are painted white, as is the custom in Latin America. At nighttime, this Plaza is a strikingly beautiful place of serenity in a busy world.

Another memory comes to mind as it concerns the Tapachula Central Plaza and Gospel literature. Missionaries to Guatemala sometimes find it necessary to leave the country in order to renew their visas for their stays in the country. Our papers had expired, and it was necessary to leave the country. At that time the Guatemalan law required you stay three days out of the country and then you were allowed to return with a new visa, and an additional few months can be arranged with the Guatemalan Consulate.

Such was the occasion for our stay in Tapachula. We were so enchanted with the beautiful Plaza, and we enjoyed mingling with and watching the people. On this occasion, we had been passing out tracts and were observing a man who was reading a newspaper across from us and down a ways. He seemed to be very agitated and unable to concentrate on his reading, for he would read a while, shuffle the paper loudly, and read again—all with little attention to what he was reading.

As he rose to leave, we had almost let him go, before Gene approached the man and offered him a Gospel tract. He was courteous and somewhat attentive as Gene talked with him. The tract contained the plan of salvation and some Scriptures in bold print. After looking at the tract for a moment, the man asked Gene, "What are those?" He pointed to the bolded Scripture verses. Gene explained that they

were Scripture verses about salvation from the Holy Bible. The man quickly and decisively said, "I'm going to go and buy me a Bible." And immediately he left and went toward the commercial area near the plaza, presumably to buy a Bible.

Gene felt he was very serious. It was a real cause for rejoicing, and we have often wondered if he did what he proposed to do and, if so, what was the final outcome. Thankfully, the Lord is keeping track of all of our unknown "outcomes" in Heaven. Praise God!

### **Rural Mexico**

On one of our many trips through Mexico, we stopped in a little village to fill the tank with gasoline. Though we had wanted to pass out tracts to the people mingling or doing business there, we were reluctant to do so because the people seemed hard and bad-spirited toward the Americans. So, we decided not to pass out the literature there at that time.

While stopped at the station, however, Sis. Easley needed to retrieve something from the back seat of the car and while doing so took out the box of tracts and set it on the top of the car in order to reach something. When she got back in the car, she inadvertently left the box of tracts on top of the car. As we pulled out of the station, we noticed all these people waving at us and pointing toward the top of the car. We immediately realized what we had done. The people, in the mean time, began running to pick up the tracts as they flew here and there. They were trying to help us not to lose so many, we supposed. As the people ran to us to return the pieces they had picked up, Bro. Easley wanted to thank them for their help, so he gave each a piece of the literature. As our rescuers and now no longer strangers, they must have felt more comfortable with us and happily accepted our gifts!

The people continued to run to collect more tracts, but the Lord checked us, and we encouraged them to leave them, for we felt that the Lord had meant for them to be scattered abroad in that particular place! We have often wondered since about those un-retrieved tracts and who else may have read the Gospel in that little town that night. God is indeed a cunning Workman...making sure that all things work together for our good!

### **Conclusion**

Is it worthwhile to send the missionary? Is it worthwhile to send Gospel literature? I believe the people standing along the streets in Sumpango, the men at the border crossing, the crowd gathered around our car in Mazatenango, the man in the Tapachula Plaza, the campesinos in rural Mexico, and many, many others would all answer, "Yes, Gospel literature impacts lives."