



THE CHURCH PLANTER

Summer

A Newsletter of Church Planting International

2012

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In Peru - Ministry to Churches, Trip to Yaminahuas, Mission Team, and Pastors' Conference

From June 5th to July 5th, my son Matthew and I were in Peru. I spent the first week in Lima relating to pastors and preaching – five times in those first few days. On June 13th, I went to the jungle city of Pucallpa with Frank Knorr who was part of our team that visited the Yaminahua tribe in the remote jungles. The rest of our mission team arrived in Pucallpa on June 23rd. When we returned to Lima there was more ministry in churches followed by a pastors' conference. – Steven Shepard



My Mission Team Experience

- By Randy Meyers (Randy is an elder at Stonebridge Church of Perrysburg, Ohio, where he works as a math teacher and lives with his wife Dee and their four children. Randy was also a featured speaker at CPI's pastors' conference held July 2-4 in Lima)

The pioneering missionary William Carey said we should “expect great things from God.” Ten of us from three different states went to the jungle city of Pucallpa, Peru, expecting great things, and I think we are all confident that the Lord did great things among us. While we cannot measure the impact of our work on those to whom we ministered, we can be certain that God blessed each one of us on this mission.

While in the jungle city of Pucallpa our team ministered to three Shipibo Indian communities and one Yaminahua Indian community that had left their village in the remote jungle to settle near a garbage dump. Our team stayed in one of the Shipibo villages, and so we literally lived and worked among the people. When we returned to Lima, we ministered to a poor church where a pastor had given up most of his home so the people could have a place to meet. Altogether, we administered three medical and two eyeglass clinics, ministered to hundreds of children, distributed food, did a little construction work, and preached the gospel in various churches and villages.

While our team was assembled from various congregations, we clearly had a common bond in Christ. That it was a privilege for all of us to serve was plainly evident. My daughter Rebekah, age 17, and the youngest person on the team, said, “It was the best experience of my life. I don't want to leave.”

Although this was my fourth trip to Peru, this may have been the most spiritually satisfying for me personally. Working alongside my daughter was truly a blessing. In addition, I thought it was a special privilege to witness to people who are becoming first-generation Christians. The Lord is doing great things in Peru. Please pray for the advancement of the gospel among the Shipibos, the Yaminahuas, and the people of Lima, Peru.



Steven Shepard assists Shipibo leader Samuel Ramirez in baptism of 23 new believers.



Mission team members (above) partake of an evening meal that we shared with a Shipibo family in the village where we stayed. There was no furniture or beds and hardly any possessions in the home.



On left, Frank Knorr prays for a child who was treated at a village medical clinic.

True Branches of the Vine

Article by Steven Shepard

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." John 15:1-5

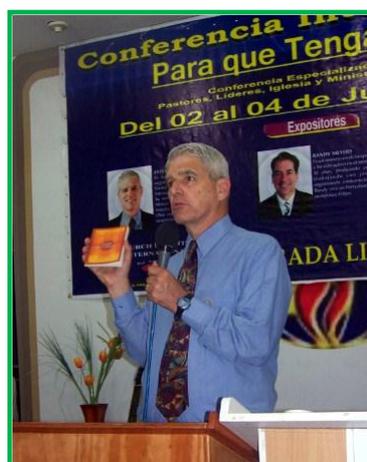
In the Old Testament the nation of Israel was identified as God's Vineyard; but His vineyard did not produce fruit and was ultimately rejected. Here Jesus says, "I am the true vine" and speaks of two kinds of branches. First are the branches Jesus says are "in Me" but do not bear fruit and are taken away. These branches represent those who are externally identified with Jesus and His people, but just like the physical Jewish nation, they lack a vital union with Jesus and do not bear fruit. They are not born again of the Spirit and are therefore not the true branches. The other kind of branch bears fruit and is pruned. Jesus tells His disciples, "Abide in Me," which means "remain or dwell in Me". He says that unless we dwell in Him we will not be able to bear *any* fruit for God; but *everyone* who does dwell in Him will "bear much fruit." By this we know that the branches which did not bear fruit were never really connected to the Vine in the first place. They never had a union with Jesus; because if they had, they would have "born much fruit." (Is 5:1-7; Matt 7:21-23; 2 Cor 13:5)

The union of Christ with His people, depicted by the vine and the branches, is the essential characteristic of all true Christians. Romans 8:9 says, "...if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." Union with Christ is illustrated again and again in Scripture. We are members of His body, living stones of a spiritual house, and His bride. Jesus says in John 14:20, "At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." When Jesus says, "Abide in Me, and I in you" ... (15:4), He is in effect saying, "I am the True Vine; be a true branch in Me by believing in Me." (1 Cor 12:12; 1 Peter 2:5; Eph 2:22; Rev 21:2; Eph 5:25-32; John 17:21-23)

As believers we are to continue to put our entire trust in Christ alone and His finished work for us on the cross. In this way we become convinced of and experience His love for us. Jesus later says in John 15:9, "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love." When He commands us to abide in His love, He does not mean for us to strive in our own strength to remain in our love for Him; but rather that we should abide in, rest in, and rejoice in *His love for us*. John 15:10 then says, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love." This does not mean that His love for us is conditional upon our obedience to His commandments. That interpretation would be salvation by works which the Bible does not teach. Rather, His love for us is the motivation for our love for Him; and it is our love for Him which is the motivation for our obedience. It is as we love and obey Jesus that we *experience* the reality of our union with Him (1 John 4:19; John 15:10; John 14:21). All believers are already in union with Christ, but we can grow in that knowledge. The result is that we will bear "much fruit," a fruit that comes naturally because of being connected to the Vine and having the life of the Vine dwelling inside. The key is to live as true branches connected to the True Vine; and this means receiving, resting, and rejoicing in Jesus' love for us and all that He has done for us. (1 John 2:24-25; John 6:54-56; Rom 8:35-39; John 15:13)



Above: a CPI team heads out for a visit with the Yaminahua tribe in the remote jungle villages. Top from left are CPI missionary Cesar Soto, Frank Knorr, & CPI missionary Tom Hopkins. Bottom from left are Lena and Lorenzo, who are two of the four CPI sponsored Yami Bible school students.



Steven Shepard at the Lima pastors' conference on the book of John. One pastor commented, "The teachings...in the truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ illumine our understanding, affirm us in the truth, and bring us freedom and confidence in Jesus." CPI distributes hundreds of books to pastors at the conferences.



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