

Reluctant Healer

by
Roger Smalling

The Landcruiser bounced cheerfully down the mountain road, with a mischievous knack for hitting every pothole dead center. The air grew warm and muggy as we descended toward the coast from the Andean highlands of Ecuador. But the discomforts were assuaged by the fellowship and joking of us three men, along with the anticipation of the open-air campaign that evening.

Julio knew the road well. His occupation as a jeweler drew him to cities around Ecuador to sell his merchandise. Machala was a coastal town he visited occasionally, where he would stop and stay with his cousin who pastored a church there.

If an armpit could be transformed into a town, it would resemble Machala. Warm and humid with similar odors. Germs lurking, ready to pounce. Pigs wallowing in mud ponds while swarthy-skinned children, barely clothed, play games in the streets.

Julio's cousin had invited him to hold an open-air film campaign in Machala. Such campaigns always drew crowds. Televisions were scarce in those days, so a movie was a big attraction, even if projected outdoors onto the side of a whitewashed building.

We arrived just before dusk. The pastor was waiting. It took about a half hour to get the equipment set up, while a few christians strode around town with a portable hailer to invite the people to the campaign.

About twelve rows of benches had been hauled out of the church and these were quickly filled. A crowd formed behind them.

The mosquitos were thrilled to meet a gringo. Their insidious attempts to lodge in my ear reduced my amiable disposition to an all-time low. Sinus allergies tortured me. Fatigue smothered me, and I saw no way to contribute to the meeting that night. I thought it best to stand in the shadows behind the crowd, out of the way.

Julio led the singing as more people arrived. His dynamism seized the crowd as the fervent music blended with the tropical atmosphere. Nothing unusual

happened until Julio said, "...and after the film is over, Brother Roger will pray for the sick!"

I gasped. Surely he didn't mean it! Who was going to pray for ME? How could I pray for the sick if I was feeling lousy myself? Impossible! I waved my hands in the air and mouthed "NO! NO!", while bouncing up and down on the balls of my feet.

Since I was standing in the shadows, Julio could not see me clearly. With his enthusiastic temperament, he assumed I was moved by the Spirit, and bellowed, "YES! Brother Roger is going to pray for the sick!"

In Julio's tradition, it was considered an honor to pray for the sick. This 'honor' usually fell to the senior minister present, so I could not refuse without offending. So, I quietly prayed with faith and fervor. "Lord," I said, "make him forget he said that."

He didn't forget. Toward the end of the film, about 20 mosquito bites later, Julio stood up and decreed, "Now Brother Roger is going to pray for the sick!" So I strode up to the platform confidently, as though I knew what I was doing, faced the crowd and began to preach about the power of Christ. At the invitation, four people came up for prayer, two men and two women. Two complained of back trouble. A short gentleman with a ponch approached, the buttons of his white shirt straining to hold in his protruding belly. A tall lady with an uncomfortable expression came next.

They thanked me for my prayer and returned to their place in the crowd. Nothing spectacular. In fact, nothing seemed to have happened at all. The Pastor closed the meeting with a Gospel message, and I gave the matter little thought until the astonishing events of the following evening.

The news spread around town about the film campaign the next day. We assumed this would happen and set up the equipment in a nearby spacious field to accommodate a larger crowd. Over 200 showed up.

Again, I was asked to pray for the sick. This time I felt better and strode up to the platform with confidence. But when I turned to the audience to speak, I noticed that four other people had followed me up, -- the same four from the previous night.

Before I could say a word, one of the ladies took the microphone, and said, "Last night I was on my way to the hospital, with severe internal pains, when we passed by the meeting. I said to my husband, 'stop the car, and let the brothers pray for me'. When brother Roger prayed for me, nothing

seemed to happen until I started down toward the benches. Then all of a sudden my pains disappeared. I never went to the hospital.”

One of the men was next, and said, “I had a protruding hernia. When brother Roger prayed for me, it went in and closed up”. The other two had back problems and both bent down and touched their toes.

I was dumbfounded. I had felt no power that night, no special anointing and not even much faith. My sinus allergies were still bothering me, and the only one in the group that didn’t get healed was me!

I took the microphone as the four joined the crowd which had grown attentive. With such a positive introduction, I began to preach with confidence as drops of light rain began to fall. We knew how the weather worked in that area, and realized I had no more than 10 minutes to complete the message. The people standing there knew it also. I decided to blend everything together... A call to repentance with prayer for the sick, and leave the results to God.

About 60 people approached the front to receive prayer for illnesses. No time was left to pray for them individually, so I prayed a general prayer just as the deluge started.

Seven years later, we learned that a young man in that crowd was healed of tuberculosis. In gratitude to God, he donated the land on which a new church building stands today.

I am surely no healing evangelist, and was reluctant to be thrust into that role. But it didn’t matter that night in Machala. I had One along who knew all about it.