

**JOURNALS** POSTED ON APRIL 30, 2019

## Mastering the basics



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SUPPORT PLEDGED



Dear friends,

Late in March Juancito and Ziba switched from gymnastics to swimming lessons. They enjoy playing in the water, so this was a promising experience that would teach them a life-saving skill and expend some of their unending energies! After the first lesson, they were exhausted but cheerful. There was much enthusiasm for the second class. But after it, all I heard were complaints. Juancito headed the way: "I don't like that teacher anymore... she only wants me to do the same thing over and over. I want to swim as I want." Ziba, of course, joined the chorus of whines. His grumble continued, "I already know how to swim..." A perfect teaching moment, right?

"Why do you think she wants you to do that?" I asked him. He grudgingly answered, "I don't know. I don't want to go any more." Ziba gave the amen by adding: "Me either." I told them, "Listen to what I'm going to tell you." And then went on with my monologue: "She wants you to do that because you need to learn the basics of swimming. You know a little, but she wants you to be better. Once you know the basics, she will let you do something else." I used then a familiar example. "It's like soccer. Remember? You first had to learn how to kick the ball the right way, how to stop it, and how to run with it while keeping it close to your feet." They listened attentively but were not persuaded. I ended by reminding them, "We asked you if you wanted to do it and you said yes. You've made a commitment and you cannot quit now."

This experience with my kids led me to ponder on the many times that in life and ministry I've wanted to go on to the next thing without strengthening, or even establishing, the basics. We've been in Chiapas for 19 months and the pressure "to swim as I want" or "to run before crawling" keeps invading my thoughts.

First, there is a noble, ardent desire to make a difference for God's glory by impacting with the gospel the lives of the people we serve. The physical and spiritual needs in their poverty-stricken, remote and isolated rural communities are so vast: lack of employment opportunities, basic health and sanitary conditions, lack of nutritious diet, illiteracy, rapid environmental degradation, churches with

children and youth but no children and youth ministries, lack of solid and deep discipleship that engages Scripture – to name a few.

Also, there is the anxiety that comes from barely comprehending their culture and the Tsotsil and Tseltal languages. We want to ask about their families and life stories, but we have a language barrier. We're taking Tsotsil lessons; however, we lack the language skills to have a conversation.

Finally, there is inferred pressure to show our support network that our ministry makes a difference in people's lives.

As Denise and I become acquainted with the lives of those we serve, we often wonder, "what difference can we really make?"

We're on this journey for the long haul. So, we have intentionally decided to master two things we believe to be foundational in our calling to Chiapas. *"A little thing is a little thing, but faithfulness in a little thing is a big thing,"* Hudson Taylor wisely observed. **We want to be faithful in two "little things": depending on God and cultivating trust and relationships.**

**We must depend on God for guidance, provision, and protection.**

Do we take the time to listen to the Spirit's guidance? Are we obeying his voice? Or are our thoughts and actions driven by worry and fear? Do we trust that He will continue to provide for ours and ministry needs? Do we trust He protects us as we traverse the roads in Chiapas? **We've seen God's faithfulness in every step of this adventure but trusting and depending on Him is a day-to-day practice.**

**Cultivating trust and relationships is a gradual process. It requires**

**time, patience and care.** We've discovered it's until the third or fourth visit to a church when we start getting a glimpse of who they really are, their hopes and joys, and the challenges they face.

Conversations over meals, cooking tortillas, doing dishes, playing with the children, celebrating baptisms, a wedding, birthdays, and the birth of a child, mourning with them during the death of a mother, a child; and offering hospitality when the needed medical treatment is only offered in San Cristobal are some of the ways we've done this.

Recently, a sister from a Tseltal community sent me a WhatsApp message with a Scripture that encouraged me to keep mastering the

basics and be faithful in the little things: "*So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.*" (**1 Corinthians 15:58**).

Thank you for journeying with us as we serve and equip God's people in Chiapas!

With love and gratitude,

Juan & Denise