

PRAY POSTED ON JULY 12, 2017

Pray for J.D. and Rhonda Reed, serving the needs of the church and the needy in Christ's name in Bolivia



BOB SANTILLI

J.D. and Rhonda serve in partnership with the Unión Bautista Boliviana. Their primary focus is in development of leadership in the areas of theology, planting new churches and developing new ministries in the southern part of Bolivia. They also oversee the House of Hope (Proyectos Esperanza) in Cochabamba, which focuses on urban ministries to families, at-risk women and children in the department of Cochabamba.

J.D. writes – In some ways, the last year has been a huge challenge for me. It has nothing to do with culture or language or church systems or Bolivia. Due to meningitis almost 15 years ago, I have progressive hearing loss. This has been a source of frustration for me over the

years, but never more than that. It was very frustrating at first, and almost cost me my ministry at one point, but I learned to cope quite well with the help of some wonderful audiologists, great friends and family support.

This past summer, while we were still on home assignment, things began to take a nosedive. Suddenly there was talk of surgery (which now isn't an option), additional technology, the learning of sign language and more. Like the loss of a close friend, I have experienced levels of mourning that have come as a result. At times, all is fine and other times I feel like I am in garbage compactor #3263827 on the first Death Star (shameless Star Wars reference)!

DISCLAIMER: This post isn't meant to illicit sympathy, but to be transparent and honest about a struggle occurring on the field. I am not asking for prayers of healing or money for surgery. It is just a part of the story. Keep reading ... it gets better.

This weekend I was asked by our ministry partner to travel to the Bolivian city of Tarija and speak at the annual national women's crusade. I was going to promote two theological education programs to encourage people to continue growing in their faith. When I got there, everything was muddled. I couldn't understand the pastor leading worship; the music was distorted and garbled. He called me up front and when I got there, I responded incorrectly because I thought I was supposed to do one thing when he asked me to do another. We laughed and went on, but inside I was checking out. Not sure what was going on, I understood the leader to say we would be having the sermon next. I panicked. Was I supposed to preach? Did I misunderstand? I began to frantically look for an old sermon I could use. I prayed for God to open my eyes to the message he had for the people.

After the song, the pastor prayed and invited the speaker up to the front. I shifted in my pew and realized another couple had arisen and started to move. As the wife stepped into the aisle, I saw her husband and I became instantly confused. They walked up to the podium and he began to search for the edges of the pulpit with his hands to find the location of the microphone stand to grab the mic. As his wife sat down, he adjusted his sunglasses and began to speak.

I was transfixed as I listened to the pastor speak of the love of God, a God who we couldn't see, but who is with us on our best days and our worst days. He spoke of how a life without God was a life wasted and even if things aren't as we planned them, we must trust He is in control of everything. With every sentence, my heart softened and I realized that my prayer was answered and God was opening my eyes. It wasn't until it was over I realized I had understood every word! It was a gift. That hasn't happened for a long time. Then I looked down at my bible and realized that for a while now, this pastor hadn't seen these words for himself, but he knew the passage by heart. He may have been blind, but his heart and mind were still working just fine, and through him I was reminded of what happens when you finally give God your challenges.

After the service, I talked to them and shared with him and his wife (a long-retired missionary who grew up in California) about how they had blessed me. We shared our stories of loss with each other, we laughed and we cried together and I thanked him for a life lived with grace and love. He quickly stopped me and reminded me that I was seeing him at the twilight of what has been a long journey filled with both grief and joy. We talked for a while more about their lives together and as we were getting ready to walk away, he gently smiled and grabbed my arm ..."Don't worry, pastor," he said gently, "You will find your way back."

As we parted, I was struck by the profound realization that in mourning through this last year, all I needed to do was step back and remember what my high school Sunday School teacher once taught me, "It isn't about the speed with which you travel to God, just that you are on the journey."

I may be currently walking on an uncomfortable path, but if I just keep walking, God will help me find my way. He always has before, why wouldn't he again?

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Matthew 5:4