

Honduras

Hello Everyone,

We are very thankful to the Lord for our lives. I am writing from Xela in the highlands of Guatemala. There have been a number of different stories in the news media and multiple rumors about what happened to us here in Guatemala. I would like to try and clear up any rumors or misunderstandings about what happened.

Those of you who are not part of the Restoration, we thank you so much for your prayers and support. I would ask you please to read all the way through this letter and ask the Lord about the parts concerning which you have questions. Thank you and may the Lord bless all of you as you read this letter.

On Wednesday evening April 14, we left Guatemala City at about 6pm with approximately an hour and a half of daylight left, heading towards Escuintla. One of the persons in the car was reading the map for me and misread it. We ended up in Chimaltenango instead of Escuintla. We still had daylight so we went down through Antigua to get to Escuintla, planning on stopping at Escuintla for the night.

When we got to the highway near Escuintla there was no place to stay. We didn't want to go into the town itself because it is very difficult if not impossible to get through the narrow streets with a Ford extended cab pickup and it is even worse when towing a small trailer. We continued driving, looking for a place to stay near the main highway. There was none. At about 8:30pm, still not having found a place to stay, we decided that we were going to stay at the next town no matter what we found.

Sometime between then and 9:00 pm, 3 cars, moving at high speed caught up with us. We were traveling at 65 miles an hour. Two of them passed us and then slowed down. One was a single cab red Toyota pickup, 1990-1995 probably 2-wheel drive. The other was a white Honda Civic 4-door 1995-1999. I passed the red Toyota and then had to let a car coming from the other direction go by. When I tried to pass the white Honda, it would not let us pass. I floored the accelerator and was doing over 95 miles per hour.

When we came close to the top of a hill, because I didn't want to hit a car coming from the other direction, I pulled partially in behind the white car. When I did, the red Toyota pulled up beside us and a young man opened the passenger door and began shooting. He made no motions for us to stop or anything. He just began shooting. I believe that he shot twice in the air and then began shooting at us. He was no more than 10 feet away when he opened up and then within less than a tenth of a second he was shooting from less than 18 inches away. I yelled, "God protect us!" and immediately aimed the truck at his open door hoping to hit the door and crush him so he would stop shooting.

Four bullets hit the windshield of the truck. Two of them ricocheted because he was using a 9 mm. Two of them went through the windshield exactly where my head was. I hit the red truck and continued to push at it with our truck. During these seconds at least six bullets hit the driver's door and went through the metal. Three were stopped by the second metal skin inside the door. The other three went on through the door. Two of them went through the seat, a half an inch behind my back. The other one should have killed me. We still have not found where it went, but it should have passed through my body.

There were at least two or three that went through the driver's window and one that went through the wing window on the driver's side. At the same time that one of the men was shooting at us with a 9 mm, another one opened up with a 45 cal. One of the 45 slugs that went through my window hit my wife, Regina in the elbow and one of the 9 mm slugs hit her in the hand. The 45 cal. did a lot more damage. It broke one of the bones in her forearm and shattered the end of the bone in her upper arm.

One of the bullets that went through my seat hit my son Timothy in the leg and after entering the flesh a short ways, fell out. One of the bullets that came through my window went up and ricocheted off the metal trim going into the camper shell and hit my son Charles in the back. It didn't even break the skin. Another bullet went through my window and hit me in the upper arm. It also just went in a short ways and fell out. A small fragment of a bullet or metal hit me in the side of the head and caused some bleeding, but nothing serious.

Getting back to what happened...I continued to hit the red truck with ours until it disappeared from the scene. Then I floored the accelerator and hit the white car as hard as I could. When we hit the car, it was knocked off to the right side of the road and we left. I drove 5 km with the speedometer pegged until we saw a Shell gasoline station. I made a U-turn, taking out a tire repair sign and pulled in behind two semis. I got out of the truck all bloody and everyone kind of backed up. I asked for someone to call the police. There were no phones nor cell phones working there.

While I was trying to get in touch with the police in some way, Charles and Elizabeth helped Regina get out of the car. They have been studying emergency preparedness for Scouts and so when Regina said that she was losing a lot of blood, I put a tourniquet around her upper arm and then let them take care of it while I was trying to find out where the nearest hospital was and get in touch with the police at the same time. Finally, one of the truckers was able to get his cell phone to work and reported to the police what had happened.

While he was talking with the police, the "asaltantes" stopped in front of the gas station, but because we were parked behind the semis, they couldn't get a clear shot at us. Also there were probably 2 or 3 guys with guns at the station though they

weren't visible. The Lord protected us again, by having the semis there. After about 20 min. the police showed up on a motorcycle. I asked them to escort us to the nearest hospital. They wanted to follow regulations and wait for the firemen, but my wife was bleeding to death and I told them that I would not hold them responsible for whatever happened. We just needed to get her to a hospital so that they could get her stabilized. They would not listen. I finally said, "Look, the firemen aren't going to do anything more than what we have done. We have been trained in first aid." The police looked at me and at Regina and realized that it was true. So we took off for the hospital.

When we got there they stabilized her and then sent all of us to the nearest hospital with x-ray equipment. We drove about an hour to get to the Hospital Nacion in Mazatenango. They treated us very, very well, but one has to understand that they just don't have the money for all the necessary equipment. The police immediately put guards all through the hospital, in our rooms, around the truck, etc. Wherever we went, there were at least one or two guards accompanying us. There have been a number of instances where the "bad guys" have sent in hit teams to kill someone in the hospital when they weren't able to kill them the first time.

After x-raying Regina's arm, the doctor removed the 9 millimeter slug from her hand and disinfected both bullet wounds. He then sewed up both wounds. The next day he put on a half cast to help immobilize the broken bones in her arm. Timothy had his leg sewn up and the doctor sewed up my arm after seeing x-rays for both of our wounds to make sure that there were no bullets in them. All of us were up until 5 am Thursday morning.

I slept for an hour, then called the American Embassy in Guatemala City. They did an excellent job. They contacted the police in Mazatenango and requested that they extend us every courtesy, which they did. We were very pleased with the police response, considering their lack of equipment and money. Friday the police commissioner of Mazatenango asked me if I would be willing to go with them to the site of the attack and identify it for certain. We stopped by the gas station where we had stopped when we were escaping from our attackers. While we were there, one of the men that was there that night happened to be there and he was able to identify the owners of one of the vehicles of the assaultants.

After four days, the hospital released Regina so that she and our younger children could fly back to the States. Neil Simmons and Kreg Levensgood, ministers in the church, flew down on Friday and arrived in Mazatenango Saturday morning. I had talked with the director of the hospital and the police commissioner and I felt that probably the safest way for my family and the men from the States to get back to Guatemala City, so that they could fly out on Sunday, would be for them to travel in an ambulance with a police escort. The American Embassy provided security for them at the hotel where they stayed in Guatemala City. We are very appreciative of all the help that the Embassy personnel gave us. A few hours after Neil and Kreg arrived in Mazatenango, they left with Regina and all of our children except for our oldest, Charles, who helped me with the trip back to the States. At the same time that they left, Charles and I left with police escort to go to Xela in order to get the vehicle repaired.

On Charles' and my trip to Xela, there was a car that followed us for almost 45 min until we got to the city. I told the police that I had noticed him following us for almost 45 min and that I was going to pull over to the side of the road when we got into the city and see if he would pass us. When I did, he pulled off in behind us also. The police were out of their cars with their guns drawn in a flash and were all over him. It turned out that he was a Guatemalan missionary going to a conference here in town and that he was supposed to be meeting someone right where we had stopped. All of his papers checked out and after they had gone through his entire car checking for weapons, they let him go. Poor guy.

The reason that we went to Xela to get the car fixed and not in some other town is because the president of our mission board, Dan Norman studied Spanish there about three years ago and has remained in contact with the owners of the Spanish school. When I called him Thurs. morning and told him what had happened, he immediately contacted the owners of the school, Rolando Herrera and Nora de Herrera, and asked them if they could help us find a shop which could repair the truck. They also made arrangements for places to stay for Neil and Kreg in Guatemala City when they flew in from the States.

Dan has been after me for almost three years to stop by and visit them. Because I didn't know them, didn't know where they lived and would have had to drive about 3 hours out of our way through some fairly dangerous areas, we never came through Xela on our trips to visit the States. Well, the Lord has used this experience to bring the gospel to this brother and sister. The first day we were there, the police escorted us to their place and explained the situation to them. Afterwards, we began talking with them. They already knew about the different glories in heaven (eg. glory of the sun, moon, stars). They already believed that Christ went to preach to the spirits of those in hell that have not had an opportunity to hear the gospel in their earthly life. And, when we shared the belief in an open canon of Scripture, they accepted it overnight. When we talked to them about the Book of Mormon, they were a little hesitant, but that night Nora had a dream.

This is the dream..."I was standing on a mountainside and I saw a group of people with chains on their legs being whipped and driven down a path going into an abyss. While I was watching them being driven by that man, I heard a voice at my side that said, 'Come with me.' I turned and followed him. I did not see his face, but he was dressed in white. A short while later, I saw a beautiful green field of coffee plants. The man told me, 'These plants will produce in 5 days.' We continued on up the straight path until we came to a tank of clear water with seeds in it. The man said, 'These seeds are ready to sprout.' We continued on the path and then there was a thick cloud. We continued to walk on the path because we could see about a meter in front of us. Then I woke up."

The Lord gave me this interpretation. The men in chains are people chained by the doctrines of men. They would not go into the abyss of their own accord, but would rather go up the straight path. Maybe they would go up the path a little slower than they should because of the chains, but they would go up the path. Because of the chains though, they can't escape from Satan forcing them into the abyss unless they get the doctrines of men off of their feet. The path is the straight and narrow path that leads to eternal life. The field of coffee plants that would bear fruit in 5 days was them, Rolando and Nora- that they would accept the gospel within 5 days of us sharing it with them. The tank of seeds ready to sprout are people that are ready to accept the gospel. The cloud is the persecution which they will go through because of accepting the gospel, but that they would always be

able to see far enough in front of them to be able to take another step. When they heard the interpretation they knew by the Spirit that it was true. Charles and I then shared Lehi's vision in chapter 2 in the first book of Nephi in the Book of Mormon with them. When they heard it they accepted the divinity of the Book of Mormon. Rolando then asked us, "What should we do?" I told them they needed to be baptized. They said, "We have already been baptized. Isn't this baptism valid?" We explained to them about authority. I shared my testimony of how I was called to be a priest and later on to be an elder. They then realized that ministers must be called by God by revelation and must be ordained by other ministers who have also fulfilled the same requirements. Rolando then looked at us and said, "We know that what you are saying is true. What more testimony do we need, than to look at your car?" Wow! What a testimony to the way God can use something terrible and turn it into something which brings honor and glory to His Name!

We praise the Lord for His protection AND for letting this happen. It has opened up numerous other opportunities to share Jesus Christ and His Gospel with people. When the police, hospital staff, and reporters saw the truck, one of the first questions asked was, "How many people died?" Time after time it was said, "Este pickop era para la muerte!" (This pickup was for death.) There is no reason that we are alive, save for the mercy and protection of our Lord Jesus. . Over a quarter of our guards during the four days that we were in Mazatenango were Mormon. We were able to share the gospel with many of them. We ran out of tracts and we had to have Neil Simmons and Kreg Levengood bring some more with them. The Lord has been so good to us!

Thank you for all of your prayers and your physical help too. We would ask you to please remember Regina in your prayers. I was talking with her this morning (Thurs. April 22) and the doctors are saying that she has multiple fractures in her elbow, but that all the bones look like they are in place. They told her that she needs to exercise her arm so that the bones in the elbow don't fuse together. There is a chance that if she exercises too hard, the muscle could pull the broken part of her tibia out of place and then she will have to have surgery. We know that the Lord holds us in the hollow of His hand though and He will not permit ANYTHING to happen to us that will not be for our benefit and His honor. We thank Him for our lives! Praise His Glorious Name!

UPDATE

We are very appreciative of all your prayers. Our family is doing very well at this time. Regina did not have to have surgery on her arm. She goes to therapy twice a week to help her regain the use of her left arm. The doctor has said that it will take between 4 to 5 months for her to regain the most of the use of her arm. We will remain in the States until the orthopedic doctor releases her. We are planning to return to Honduras sometime in August. We are asking for people to pray and ask the Lord to completely heal Regina's elbow which was broken by one of the bullets. Thank you so very much for all of your prayers and support which each of you have given during this exciting time. God has been so good to us! May God bless each of you as you seek to do His will in your lives.

Thank you and may God bless you,
Chuck Sperry



FINANCIAL REPORT

We will provide a complete financial summary at the end of the year, but a report is included below of our income and expenses to date. We wish to thank everyone for their overwhelming response in offering financial and other assistance following the shooting in Guatemala. Special thanks go to Hope Christian School, for donating the proceeds of their previously scheduled benefit concert.

1/1/04 - 5/31/04 Income: \$34,334.58, Expenses: \$23,072.71

Expenses included flights for Regina and the children, and priesthood sent to Guatemala to assist them.

Typically, we issue a receipt at the end of the calendar year for all charitable donations. This saves the time and expense of having to mail individual letters for each contribution. However, if you file taxes on a period other than the calendar year and need a donation receipt sooner than January, please contact us, and we will be happy to send it earlier.

PRAYER REQUESTS

1. 100% recovery of Regina's left arm
2. Rolando and Nora Herrera in Guatemala
3. Congregations in Honduras
4. Protection for the Sperry's on their return trip to Honduras

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