Guatemala, Central America

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" Psalm 126:5.

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Jungle Boys' Camp

Three canoes glide on the dark surface of a large river; two are beautiful wood/fiberglass combinations and the third a Coleman canoe with a 6 hp outboard motor. A breeze ripples the water and the sound of paddles break the stillness of the night. The sky is black with clouds, but an occasional glimpse of stars can still be seen. Voices can be heard and flashlights seen from time to time as the occupants of the crafts call to each other to keep track of the progress of time and to track the distance covered. Tonight is survival night, and the schedule is strenuous.

The goals of this camp include teaching young men the importance of a strong faith in God, good leadership skills, working together, caring for one another, and personal responsibility. A daily Bible lesson and theme goes along with the day's activities, teaching life lessons from nature and the day's events.

The camp began Monday morning when two counselors and five boys left from El Chal. The counselors were there to map out activities and to give advice if asked, but they allowed the boy who was day leader plenty of leeway to make decisions, unless he was heading for total disaster. The goal was to put the canoes in the San Pedro River at El Naranjo, and work out any problems with learning to handle a canoe in an easy afternoon run to Santa Rosita.

As the run was to be an easy one, the counselors decided to make a younger boy the day leader. Things went pretty much as expected with a novice leader; he and his assistant were soon on the far horizon and beyond.

When they reached Santa Rosita in the late afternoon

Paddling up the river in a handmade canoe.

The group of campers pose beside the San Pedro River during their week-long experience.

the boys and the day leader decided it was time for a swim before carrying gear to the campsite. The swim carried its own penalty: it was getting dark before camp was set up and supper was cooked.

Tuesday's day leader decided on an early start, as the trek was going to be a long one with rapids to cross and 16 hours of hard paddling beyond. Breakfast was eaten in the dark. Gear was hauled to the boats and lashed down so that nothing would be lost in the rapids.

With the canoes loaded, the group sat down and studied the day's lesson. One of the points was how it is impossible to live a Christian life without God's help. This was illustrated as soon as the group reached the rapids. The boys paddled upstream as hard as they could and still could make no headway past a certain point. After spending several hours trying to inch up the rapids by sending a companion ahead with a rope to pull, they decided to mount the outboard on the canoe and use it as a tugboat. Even so, some canoes shipped water and it was slow going.

After crossing the rapids, the group decided that to keep on schedule the motor should continue to be used. The day leader decided to cut saplings and fasten the canoes side by side with the motorized canoe in the middle. The setup worked extremely well. They were able to set up camp in the early afternoon and still cool off with a refreshing swim. When the boys talked about the day before going to sleep, the hero of the day was decidedly the outboard motor. It had made possible something that was otherwise impossible. It was a vivid example of the day's lesson: how God helps Christians live victoriously even through impossible circumstances.

Wednesday's activities included a first-aid class and

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Editorial

by Brian Yoder

The Church's Unchanging Call

When I read the news these days, I'm glad that I've read the last chapters of the Book and know how this all plays out. Many details are missing from the prophetic scope of Scripture, but one thing seems certain: it's going to get worse before it gets better.

Ground-breaking headlines startle us every day. Political tensions polarize the world's strongest militaries and economies. Technology gives governments unprecedented ability to watch its citizens. Social changes have led us to unchartered territory: a Christian photographer who refused to photograph a same-sex wedding was recently sued . . . successfully. A Christian bakery who declined to provide a wedding cake for another such union was hounded out of business.

The tide is rising. Evil continually threatens and pushes at God's standards.

Jesus spoke encouraging words about the coming of evil days: *And when these things begin to come to pass . . . lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.*

Implied in Jesus' statement is a span of time, a period of waiting. Evil is here now. Redemption is coming soon. But in the meantime, what is the Church's role in the face of evil's menace?

In 1999, Y2K was upon us. One church group imagined the worst. Fearing that crowds of starving people would soon swarm out of nearby cities in search of food, they formed a community, stockpiling food, guns, and ammunition. When Y2K passed without incident, the church disintegrated. A friend who was once part of that effort told me, "My views have changed since then. I think our focus was wrong."

Don't laugh at them. They were but one example of a common mistake Christians make. When evil days approach, our thoughts tend towards survival—preserving our way of life at all cost. But Jesus never intended self-preservation to be the main motivator of His Church.

A newfound friend in Puerto Rico recently told me that he planned to march with evangelicals to protest the passage of immoral laws. He has no time for Christians who do nothing to influence the direction of their country through political means.

Jerry Falwell tried that. In 1980, the media credited the Moral Majority with Reagan's election. Through the eighties, conservative evangelicals used their access to the White House to lobby for moral positions on homosexuality and abortion. But a decade later, the tide had shifted. With a pen stroke, a later President undid what the Moral Majority had worked for nearly a decade to accomplish. Cal Thomas, a key figure in Falwell's organization, came away from his experience with this message: *The world needs the Church to be the Church.*

The Church's call is not to isolation and self-preservation. Neither is it to political activism and persuasion. Jesus founded His Church with a mandate that will never cease to be her highest call and greatest gift: *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.*

Spiritual fruit is the proof of relationship with Christ. It is exotic and sweet—a rare find in an evil world. It stands out like a naval orange in a bowl of crabapples. It is the natural by-product of a walk of faith and obedience to Christ. It is the beauty and sweetness of heaven born into the twisted environment of earth in loving word, forgiving attitude, and caring action. It cannot be manufactured, counterfeited, or pretended, for it cannot exist apart from the One who said, *"Without me ye can do nothing."*

Fruitbearing is a question of investment. We reap what we sow, both in quality and in quantity. My daughter planted a stray kernel of sweet corn last spring and joyfully watched it grow. It matured, tassled, pollenated (with some help from Dad), and produced a single, beautiful ear of corn. She excitedly picked it, happily ate it . . . and wished for more. Why sow sparingly when we could sow bountifully? When we refrain from investing in God's Kingdom, we limit what could have been an abundant harvest.

Consider two biological principles of plant life. First, when God created life, he described it as *"yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself."* A plant's highest purpose is to produce a seed; without it, it faces extinction. Even the beauty and design of a flower simply exists to attract pollenators and to achieve the complex process of fertilization. And a seed grows, surrounded by a fruit.

Second, the only biological purpose of a fruit is to disperse the seeds within. Spanish needles cling to your pants. Somewhere along your walk, you'll pick them off and drop them where they might grow next spring. Animals eat berries, whose seeds survive the ride through the digestive system and are deposited in far-flung places; places where a new plant will grow. Some seedpods explode, flinging their seeds away.

Spiritual fruit is *seed-bearing fruit.* This proof of relationship with Christ that the husbandman seeks also contains the potential for new life. Wherever it falls, wherever it is found, it holds within it a power to draw men to Christ and to sprout and grow in other lives.

The Church's highest calling has always been to bear fruit. Today it is the Church's privilege to lift up her head, for redemption is near. It is not time to retreat into self-preservation, nor to turn aside to an inferior calling. It is time to deepen our relationship with the Fruit-giver and scatter the seed of life into the growing gloom.

Jungle Boys' Camp . . . continued

learning to use a compass. The Bible lesson of the day was trusting the Bible as our ultimate guide and doing what it says. The day leader was a younger lad who was timid in leading out, so the day started late. It was sweltering hot with the mosquitoes out in force by the time the group got under way. The objective of the day was for the day leader to lead the way to a boundary fencepost a half mile away. The compass was explained and a heading given, but the way was through thick brush and brambles. In most places it was impossible to see more than a few feet. This made things extremely difficult and at one point the day leader became so discouraged that he sat down and told the others he couldn't continue. The boys chaffed him a bit, then one of the counselors told him that as leader he could delegate and didn't have to do everything himself. This he proceeded to do, and things went better. After spending what seemed to them like forty years wandering about in the wilderness, they came out of the brush and onto the boundary line—right on target.

So much fuel had been used in coming upriver that only a small amount was left. The counselors informed the group that the next day's goal was to return to Santa Rosita. They had the option of camping at the same spot again that night and paddling through tomorrow's heat, or starting that afternoon and paddling all night long. The boys decided unanimously to start that afternoon. Thus "survival night" was born.

They broke camp in record time and by mid-afternoon the group was under way. Rain set in towards evening, but with the help of plastic tarps and garbage bags, everyone managed to stay reasonably dry. And paddling has a way of keeping a fellow warm. After dark the rain stopped, and around 9:00 pm the day leader carefully boiled coffee on a camp stove in one of the canoes, which

Discussing a Bible principle before a day on the river.

Making coffee in a canoe during "survival night."

was much appreciated by the group. They tried fishing in the dark, but without success.

Hour by hour the night passed. Near morning, a heavy rainstorm set in. As the sky lightened in the east, a stiff head wind sprang up, making progress more difficult. During the night the boys had traded off paddling so that everyone got some sleep (some more than their share), but with fourteen hours of paddling behind them everyone was ready for a rest. They called a halt midstream, and took a short nap. Then they witnessed a perfectly glorious sunrise with yellows, golds, and reds running together in the clouds against a blue sky.

Thursday's goal was to get to Santa Rosita, continue working on compass skills, and prepare for solo night. After breakfast and the day's lesson, the day leader decided on an hour of sleep for everyone, since they still seemed sleepy. One of the counselors went on ahead of the group with most of the gear, which he dropped at the campsite. He continued on to Naranjo to buy pop and ice cream, which the boys later found, much to their delight, with their compasses. After the treat the boys picked and prepared their campsites for their night alone, the younger ones with a certain amount of fear and trembling at being alone in the dark.

Friday dawned bright and clear. The day's goals were to clean up the canoes, learn to cook tortillas, find edible things in the area, and to get to El Naranjo where Jeff and Crystal would feed and lodge everyone for the night.

Saturday, the last day of camp, was spent driving to El Chal and preparing for the small program that was given Sunday morning. As we reflect on the lessons learned, the miseries endured, and the enjoyable times together, our prayer is that God will use this time to help these boys through this journey called "life."

Benj Martin

2013 Teachers' Institute

Every year, a teachers' institute is held for Mennonite teachers all over Central America. In August, the institute was held in El Chal, Petén, Guatemala. Although this was my first Central American Teachers' Institute, I had heard from other teachers that previous institutes have always been times of encouragement and learning for Christian teachers. This year proved to be no different.

The institute started on Tuesday afternoon, August 27th, and lasted until Saturday morning. Breakfast was served at 7:00 each morning and the first session started at 8:00. There were three sessions in the morning before lunch and three more in the afternoon. Most of the sessions were held right at the Tree of Life School in El Chal, but the two sessions after supper were held at the church, about a ten-minute walk from the school. The teachers attending the event stayed in various places around El Chal. Some stayed in a school classroom,

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2013 Teachers' Institute . . . continued

some at the church, some at the mission house, and the rest in homes of the teachers that live in El Chal. About sixty-five teachers attended the institute. There were teachers from all of the Central American countries except Panama and Costa Rica.

Cesar Vásquez gives one of his lectures.

The themes of the sessions were well chosen and covered a variety of topics. They ranged from "The Philosophy of Christian Education" to "Practical Experiments to Use in Science Class" to "Effective Discipline." Cesar Vásquez, Santos Aguilar, Justin Ebersole, Luis Garcia, Isaías Muñoz, Aron Méndez, Jonathan Burkholder, and Wesly Muñoz all gave at least one topic throughout the week. Each one of them did an excellent job. Lectures were not the only activies. Every day, the teachers from a certain country were in charge of an activity. Some of the activities were a version of Scattergories, a map-drawing contest, and a memory-testing game. The activities were a great way to mix things up as well as give teachers ideas for activities that they can do with their students. One afternoon, there was a panel discussion on how to follow the government's education laws without losing the Christian vision. Jason Ebersole gave a few music classes that were very helpful as well. He taught the teachers how to teach music and helped us learn some new Spanish songs. Every evening after the last session, there was always a little time to play volleyball.

I saw many positive things happen during the week. I saw teachers of all ages talking and sharing ideas with people who all had at least one thing in common—a desire to teach. I saw people asking questions and giving answers. I saw a large group of people that realized that there is much more to being a Christian teacher than giving assignments and grading tests. It's about relationships with the students. It's about making sure your students realize their worth. It is easy for a teacher to think that "preparation" means well-prepared lessons, but the point was made during this institute that a teacher is not fully prepared until he has gotten down on his knees and prayed for his students.

Douglas Vásquez, Stephan Gingrich, Jason Ebersole, and Gustavo Burgos take part in a panel discussion.

The 2013 Central American Teachers' Institute was an encouraging and strengthening time for all of the teachers. Even though I am just an English teacher, I was still able to learn a lot. I think that as long as I am teaching in Central America, I will try my hardest to go every year.

Ricky Martin

Jonathan Burkholder explains scientific concepts through experiments.

The Guatemalan teachers with their diplomas.

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