



Remembering Rafael Segura

It happened in 1977, a few months after we came to live in El Chal. During a Wednesday afternoon prayer meeting, two men arrived whom we didn't know. They were brothers from a local family. When the service had ended, they made known the reason for their visit. “We want to accept Jesus as our Saviour.” They understood that they were lost and needed salvation.

The brothers from this family were close. They worked together, played together, and on payday, they drank together. But before going out to drink, they agreed together how much money to take. They would leave most of it at home in order not to waste it all, but to have some left when they returned.

It was customary among these brothers to share their ideas and big decisions together, so it was natural that Rafael and one of his brothers agreed to give their lives to the Lord together. It was a great privilege to pray with them and bring them to Jesus' feet. It was a genuine conversion and brought us much joy.

From the day of their conversion, they were faithful in attendance. Their hunger and desire for the things of the Lord was enormous. After each service, they would stay for at least an hour asking questions about the Christian life. They reminded me of the Bereans of Acts 17:11, who *received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*. Their interest and questions had an impact on other brothers of the family, who also were converted.

Despite opposition from Catholic relatives, who could not deny the truth about their new life in Christ, Rafael and his brother grew in faith, and along with other new believers entered instruction class. Their girlfriends, with whom they were living, also believed and joined them in the class. After several months, the unmarried live-in couples managed to round up their documents for a civil wedding before baptism. In one day, we celebrated eight weddings at church. Rafael and Blanca were among them. Soon after, seven couples and three young people were baptized.

As time advanced, so did the Lord's work. More people gave their lives to Christ, and the congregation grew. Two of Rafael's brothers believed and were baptized.

But though we experienced many blessings from the Lord, the peace and quiet in Guatemala was being taken away. There were signs of guerrilla activity

that threatened the country. Because of the uncertainty of the times, we saw it necessary to select and ordain other brethren to the ministry. Two years after his conversion, Rafael was ordained pastor and his brother Catalino was ordained deacon.

The passing of time showed us that God's hand was in that decision. War and violence soon made it necessary for us to leave the country for two years until the political situation quieted down. During this time, we maintained contact with the brethren by telephone to encourage and counsel them concerning the work.

At last Rafael's mother, who had been very opposed to the Gospel, gave her life to Christ. Although his father did not believe, he did not discourage her from her decision. She served the Lord faithfully until she left this life. Sadly, not all of Rafael's brothers continue faithfully today.

Because of government pressure to participate in the Civil Patrol, Rafael felt obligated to move his family to another region, where he served as a pastor in El Guayabo (La Sorpresa). Catalino and his wife went to live in Poptún. From there they traveled to El Chal on weekends to attend church. In this way he stayed exempt from serving on Patrol.

Rafael never returned to live in El Chal. Over the years, he shepherded churches in different places: Mixcolajá, Pasaco, Los Achiotes, and finally again in El Guayabo. Despite his wife Blanca's death several years ago, Rafael served faithfully in the Lord's vineyard. In the last months, he battled with diabetes and high blood sugar. On June 13, 2020, the Lord called him home.

It has been a blessing and a privilege to serve beside my brother Rafael through the years. Because of our Lord and the living hope we have in Christ, we anticipate living, serving, and walking with him and millions



Rafael Segura was a soldier before he knew the Lord, and became a soldier for the Lord since his conversion in 1977. He died on June 13, 2020. He was 72.

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EDITORIAL

Dean Boll

Liberty and Restrictions

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.
Isaiah 61:1

These familiar but precious words from the Old Testament prophecy of the mission and power of the Captain of our salvation, Jesus Christ. Through His life, ministry, death, and resurrection, He unveiled to man the path of true liberty and set the captive free. And we here at MAM, along with most of you who read this newsletter, strive to fulfill a high and important calling in places of sorrow and bondage. We strive to be ambassadors for Christ—ambassadors of liberty. In our churches here in Guatemala and among followers of Christ all over the world, the desire of God's people is to promote liberty in every aspect of our life and work.

The word *liberty* is heavily used in the English language. Its Spanish translation, *libertad*, is probably equally well-worn in Latin society. In fact, a main town here in northern Guatemala bears the name *La Libertad* (liberty). Among politicians, patriots, individualists, and all types of activists, the word *liberty* is a catchword, a slogan, and, at times, a battle cry.

As I recently contemplated some of these things in a study of Galatians 5:13,* I had to think how society's idea of liberty differs greatly from the Christians' understanding of the word. Often a person uses this word to refer directly or indirectly to the freedom to do exactly as one pleases. The Bible shows this kind of liberty to be an illusion. This perceived liberty leads to bondage. Slavery. The ills of modern society show this to be devastatingly true.

Politicians and patriots use the word to promote freedom from oppression within a society. While this definition of liberty is much nobler, unfortunately, in the real world this freedom from oppression is often limited in scope and doesn't apply to all people within the society. It sacrifices the liberty of some groups to facilitate the liberty of others.

So, where do we find true liberty? If we are going to be ambassadors of liberty, what will our message and plan of action be?

The Bible contains the Gospel message—the good news of true liberty. This liberty is freedom from sin's bondage, freedom to serve our Maker, freedom

to live with His very presence within us and to live in communion with Him. This liberty touches every part of a person's life and stands in stark contrast to Satan's bondage, which separates one from the Creator and places him in a downward spiral to destruction.

As we live as *extranjeros* (foreigners) here in Guatemala, we have tried to find ways to connect with our neighbors and to faithfully promote the work of our local congregations, always with the goal of sharing the Good News of true liberty and exemplifying its outworking in our own hearts. But in recent months, most of our methods of sharing this message of liberty have been affected by the restriction of civil liberties in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. I will not take much of this space to describe these restrictions, since restrictions like these have affected most of the globe in the past months; but I will try to share how some of these have affected our daily operations.

I first began to think about this article one warm Sunday afternoon in mid-May about 4:45, while facing a unique set of circumstances. Normally I would have been preparing to begin the afternoon church service—hearing the mission boat returning from the run upriver to pick up the church sisters, jotting down announcements, thinking ahead to another busy week with its projects, visits, preparations for visitors, and preparations for children's class, prayer meeting, and youth class.

Instead, this Lord's Day took a very different pattern. Today, there were no services in our church. My trusty old motorcycle had remained quietly on my porch all day instead of helping me with the normal little Sunday errands involved with the church services. It was illegal to use it! The mission truck, stationed silently in the backyard, fell under the same restriction. There was no hauling anyone to church, even if there would have been a service. This was a stay-at-home weekend. It was illegal to drive anywhere in the country for any reason other than for an emergency. Stores were tightly closed all weekend.

This level of restriction was very temporary, but ongoing curfews and closures continue to affect us in many ways. Borders are closed—no visitors. Locomotion is restricted, the government says. These restrictions, along with others, have forced us to cancel the annual youth institute in late June.

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more in glory for eternity. Until then, let's follow and serve our God faithfully until He calls us as well.

Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast

been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Matthew 25:21

Mark Gingerich

Selma Quiñonez

Selma Quiñonez of San Andrés went to be with her heavenly Father on June 26, 2020, having finished her work here on earth.

As I think back over the few months that I knew her, several words come to mind that describe her life. One was hospitality. When the Mixcolajá church started supporting the San Andrés church on Sunday evenings, two men were chosen to help with the service. Anyone else interested in going along was welcome until the pickup was full. When Selma heard we were coming, everyone was invited for supper . . . even when we started having fifteen to twenty people going every week! More than once as we were preparing to leave after the service, she would slip a food item into my hand as a gift. When my family was visiting and she knew how much extra food preparation it took, she gave us a lemon meringue pie.

Another attribute that she demonstrated so well was faithfulness. She was a faithful attendee every service in their small church, ready and willing to participate in any way she could. She stood faithfully by her husband's side, through hard times and busy times. Her quiet, graceful spirit was a faithful example to the community around her. And she was faithful to her Lord until the end. Her testimony was quite clear; she was ready to go at a moment's notice!

Selma also displayed a beautiful mother's heart toward every person she met. I only knew her for a few months, but in that short time I grew to love her and to think of her as a grandmother figure in my life. She cared about how my family and I were doing. She liked to teach me a few Spanish words each time we were together, but she also made me feel comfortable even though I couldn't communicate with her well.

Her smile was one of genuine pleasure, and she felt like a safe person with whom to share your heart.

When I learned of her passing, I felt a huge sense of loss for her family, the tiny church of San Andrés, and the whole town. And then I felt a huge sense of loss for us and for myself. She would never again greet me with her warm smile or treat me to the luxury of eating her amazing cooking. Never again would I see her sitting on the front bench beside her granddaughter in



Selma Quiñonez lived well, served many, and left sadness in her passing. She died on June 26, 2020.

the tiny San Andrés church. Her passing has left a huge hole in the lives of many people. But I know she is rejoicing in the presence of her Redeemer, where she has longed to be for so many years.

I do not wish her back. I pray for many godly women to rise and fill the places she has left: to feed the hungry, to care for the hurting, and to be faithful wherever God has called. May I be one of them.

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

Revelation 22:12

Lynnae Zimmerman

Liberty and Restrictions . . . continued

It's not possible to do public literature distribution.

The phrase "closed doors" comes to mind. Now how do we reach these people for God? But God is faithful, and the work is His, not ours. Every time doors close, other doors open. Being "stuck" in Santa Rosita has been a blessing in many ways. Relationships have been strengthened with the people we live closest to. And could it be that the message of true liberty carries more impact in a time of restricted civil liberties?

I have been reminded again that our efforts are not the means that accomplish God's work; it is God's presence working through us. Yes, we need to

press on and vigilantly look for opportunities and open doors to "proclaim liberty to the captives." But may we recognize that it is God who opens and closes the doors, and the work is His. May we seek Him daily and hourly for direction as we yield ourselves for His use. May we use this special time of restricted civil liberties to exemplify and share true liberty. And let's not miss the open doors God has placed before us while focusing on all the doors that have closed around us.

** For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. Galatians 5:13*

The Changes Around Me

Changes. They're everywhere. Changes are a part of life in Oratorio, especially during COVID-19. However, some things remain the same: a sovereign God who never changes; physical needs for food, water, clothing, housing, medical care, and exercise; social and emotional needs of friendship, inspiration, purpose for living; and last, but certainly not least, spiritual needs for Christian fellowship, salvation, and worship.

COVID-19 has challenged our daily lives and broken our routines. It has caused us to carefully consider what God wants us to be doing *this* day. COVID-19 has brought us many restrictions, which are constantly changing here in Guatemala. Here is a sample of life in April.

The morning begins best with a Bible, a journal, and a cup of coffee. Time to focus on the gifts of the Creator, while the birds sing their praises outside. The small clinic and pharmacy, where I spend at least a part of most days, opens at 8:00 a.m. During COVID, the pharmacy has been able to remain open. Some days no consults could be given due to travel complications for the nurse.

Leaving shortly before 8:00, I don the mandatory mask and walk the half mile to the clinic. The property looks barren and sad. Several months ago it was home to the Muñoz family, but since then, two work groups came and cut the trees in preparation for a building project. But no work groups are coming these days.

Once in the clinic I sweep the floor, do some cleaning, and water some outdoor flowers while waiting for customers in the pharmacy. I spend most of my time in the pharmacy, waiting for customers and studying.

Marleny arrives. It's nice when there are at least two of us here. It's a quiet morning. A little

girl comes asking for Tylenol. Two youth boys come looking for masks. I ask Marleny about her university classes. It's one way that I seek to support her as she attends (virtually now) a secular university.

About 11:00 Priscila arrives, and shortly thereafter a few people come for consults. Doña Enma brings us some lunch around 1:00. She is Priscila and Marleny's aunt, who lives nearby and sells lunches. We are happy to help her out by buying one! The clinic closing time has varied greatly these days due to varying curfews or other reasons. About 3:00 we head to our homes.

Walking home I consider supper options. With varied schedules, suppers have been the meal Twila and I eat together at the girls' house. After checking what we have in the kitchen and what I need, I walk the block to the store and make my purchases. The neighbor lady beckons to me, patting the ledge of concrete beside her to show that I should come and sit with her. We sit and chat for a while. There's no hurry—even the curfew was changed from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Eventually I head to the house, where I call a sister as I start making supper. Technology has been a blessing these days, making communication with family and friends around the world and in Guatemala so much easier.

Life continues amid changes and restrictions. Hopefully someday we will once again be able to gather in our church, teach children in the school, and visit more freely. But hopefully we will also have grown through this time and be more apt for the work God has for us. And just maybe, God will use this time to build and develop relationships that would not have developed otherwise.

Sara Breneman

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