

LATIN AMERICAN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Developing Healthy Churches and Church Leaders in Latin America and Beyond

Mission and Ministry Newsletter

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Latin American Missions—Reflecting on a Quarter Century

I made my first trip to Latin America in the spring of 1994. Next year, I will mark 24 years of visits, observations, work, and activities in Latin America. As I evaluate what I have seen and learned over the years, I believe the greatest challenge before us is to respond to two great needs in the churches.

The need to develop healthy churches

A healthy church is one that can function in its own ministry context with a minimum of outside help. Outside help may be necessary for special projects, but not for continuing ministry in the ministry context. Beyond the need to learn effective evangelism and church planting, the most pressing needs of the churches are (1) to understand the nature of the church as an organism rather than as an organization, (2) to train preachers and to develop workers guided by the biblical model, and (3) to work toward biblical organization and local leadership that can prepare more workers. Healthy churches also know how to help members develop spiritually in prayer and worship, in discipleship and commitment, in Bible knowledge, and in involvement. Healthy churches know how to manage and resolve conflicts biblically.

Training, seminars, and workshops focused on biblical teaching, spiritual development and biblical leadership are essential for the future growth of the church in Latin America.

The need for evangelism training—especially in the process of developing interest

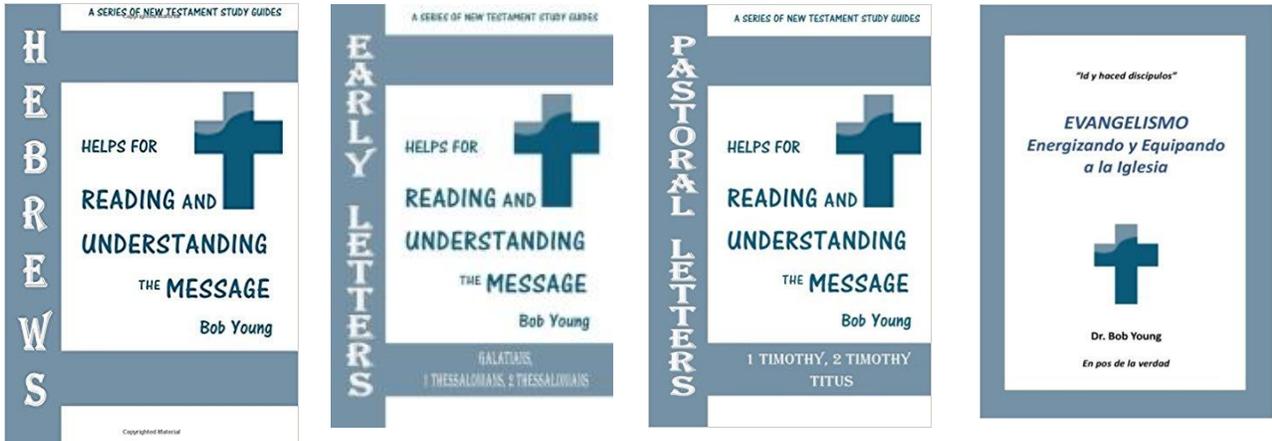
I regularly teach evangelism workshops. Many Christians need and want training in how to share their faith. A factor that must be addressed is our lack of contact with interested persons. The church needs training in how to find and establish relationships with prospective Christians. My workshops have an entire section focused on how to “prospect”—how to find prospects, identify them, make contact, and develop interest.

In this newsletter is a report on my recent trip to Peru. At a home Bible study on Friday evening, four contacts were present and I modeled the process of developing interest as I taught the Bible study. At the weekly Saturday meeting of youth and young adults, four non-Christians were present; in conversations with them, interest was developed for continuing Bible studies. Two additional prospects visited on Sunday; again, I sought to develop interest. Three days—ten prospects and contacts, people with interest in spiritual things, promises of continuing contact and Bible studies. I work with churches and Christians to learn how to develop interest through spiritually-focused activities, Bible studies, youth activities, classes, and seminars. When Christians observe the process of developing interest, they see that they can do the same thing.

The church I was visiting had previously used various non-spiritual activities to try to attract new contacts. Annual medical and vision clinics had resulted in no contacts with interest in spiritual things; several weeks of teaching English across three years had resulted in only one young lady becoming a Christian. We must evaluate our evangelism models and determine how to touch those who are most likely to be interested in spiritual things. Rather than using diversions, it is time for the church to consider how to meet real spiritual needs. A key factor in my observation and experience is whether we focus on spiritual needs or physical needs. Sometimes, the gospel cannot be heard until we meet the most pressing physical needs, but the goal is always focused on the spiritual needs and the presentation of the gospel.

Reports: New Publications, Writing Projects, International Mission Trips, US Travels and Activities

One of my New Year's resolutions was to publish at least one book in 2017. With four books published this year, I have found new energy to work more diligently on additional books and publications. You can see all of



my books on my Amazon author's page (www.amazon.com/author/bro.bobyong). The Bible Study Guides make wonderful Christmas gifts—cost is \$7 per volume, or \$20 for the set of Hebrews, Early Letters, and Pastoral Letters, both prices include postage (normal retail is \$8.99 each, plus postage). Send a check for the correct amount and indicate how many of which volumes you want. (For information on quantity discounts or to obtain a review copy, contact me.)

Even though writing, editing, and publishing books is a time-consuming process, during 2017 I have also been able to intensify my work on the website and various writing and recording projects.

September Trip to Dominican Republic

My preference is always to let the local churches plan the work that will be done on my visits. On this trip, the Dominican brothers scheduled me to work with six churches—Bellas Colinas, Las Caobas, Pueblo Nuevo, Pantoja, Las Palmas, and Americanos. There are now eleven churches in the Dominican with elders.

- At **Bellas Colinas**, I spent a day with the minister, planning the work, making suggestions, counseling, working on problem resolution, and focusing on evangelism. This church is about twelve years old, has their own building (*picture, right, from my files*) with an attendance of 35-40. Attendance has plateaued at this church which is mostly a family church. A great challenge is to think through how to reach out to the community.
- The **Las Caobas** church has two elders. They asked me to teach on and encourage evangelism. This church has a great attitude and vision to help establish and strengthen other churches in the country.
- At **Pueblo Nuevo**, we spent the day counseling, talking, and studying. The elders had numerous questions. I was encouraged by their focus on outreach and their plans for more community service and outreach. They are adding to and improving their building at their own costs (*picture, left, of an assembly at Pueblo Nuevo, from my files*).



- **Pantoja** is a relatively new church (about four years old). We worked on evangelism in the streets, identified two or three good contacts, and established new studies. I presented an evangelism seminar for the members; I also taught a home Bible study with 13—

including several neighbors. The church has an attendance of 35-40, plus an equal number of children.

- A primary purpose of this trip to the Dominican Republic was to work in a campaign at **Las Palmas**. This church has two elders and has purchased their own building. They are actively assisting other local churches in the country in attaining their own buildings. This is a strong church; there were 28 men at the organizational meeting preceding worship. The biggest disappointment of the trip was the interruption caused by Hurricane Maria. Due to the hurricane we did not get to spend specific time in small evangelistic group gatherings to establish closer relationships with prospects and to answer questions. The elders said that this was a major factor in the smaller number of baptisms. Nonetheless, the campaign resulted in new contacts, new studies, several prospects who are almost ready for baptism, and one commitment in baptism.
- At **Americanos**, the evangelist and I shared good conversations about organization, power structures, and planning strategies. There have been nine baptisms thus far this year and four contacts are almost ready for baptism (*picture right, an assembly at Americanos, from my files*).



This trip provides a good example of what I do in training locals, encouraging and strengthening the churches, teaching evangelism, modeling effective Bible study methods, and developing healthy churches.



October Trip to Peru

At **Los Pinos** in Lima, I spent two days of teaching at Instituto Bíblico Interamericano (IBI). I enjoyed the time with students who are serious, respectful, interested, and responsive. Topics I taught included how to read the Bible theologically, simple exegesis, moving from the biblical text to the sermon, and evangelism. On Thursday evening, I preached Ephesians. After I had preached an hour, they asked me to continue for another 30 minutes. I have never had that happen in the U.S.!

Friday evening, I taught a home Bible study with several new contacts, and on Saturday evening I spoke at the youth gathering where we made contact with more visitors and prospects. I am not sure how I feel about attracting people with the presence of a North American, but it does give the local church new contacts, new prospects, and new Bible studies. Sunday, I preached twice, sharing a renewed vision for the church and showing how every member must be involved for the church to function.

Saturday afternoon, I enjoyed an extended conversation with the local preacher about the challenges of evangelism in Peru. The local churches continue to reach out, but it is a slow process and most churches are growing slowly. Most churches struggle with finding prospects. That is, the church does not have contact with those who are interested. Los Pinos hosts the Institute which gives access to some extra workers. As a result, the local church is working in two new church plants, San Clemente in southern Peru (near Pisco) and Cajamarca in northern Peru.

On Monday I traveled to **Cusco for the Encuentro Iberoamericano**. This annual international conference moves from country to country. This year, I was privileged to be asked to serve as a workshop presenter. I especially enjoyed the singing of the brothers and sisters who speak Quechua (*picture right*). The conference includes a nightly





campaign. It is always special to see the power of the gospel when those present decide to be baptized. Two of the three baptismal candidates were a married couple who were attending for the first time and upon hearing the gospel decided to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (*picture left*).

I previously shared some reflections about Cusco on Facebook. Here is a brief summary—

Tuesday I met Cristian at breakfast. He was in Cusco on business; we talked about why I was in Cusco. He asked about attending the evening sessions; I gave him my business card. Wednesday he told me he had read several articles from my website and was looking forward to reading more. Thursday we shared only a quick

greeting. Friday morning, I ate breakfast early and went to my room to pack. When I went to the foyer with my luggage, Cristian was there. We talked about my departure, he promised to stay in touch, we talked about the Christian faith. He said that he wanted to pray for me in my travels. I said that would be OK, and that I would also like to pray for him. We prayed, each for the other; his prayer told me that he spoke regularly with God. I pray for eyes to see opportunities, for boldness to share, and that my words will open hearts. *“God, open my eyes again today, so I will see where your mission intersects my life, so I will live each moment sensitively, so I will see through your eyes.”*

December Trip to Honduras

After a hiatus of two years (during which time I served as a senior board member), I am again serving as a member of the board of directors of Baxter Institute. A part of that commitment is attending the board meeting and graduation at Baxter each December. After making numerous trips of 2-3 weeks during 2017, the four-day trip to Baxter will seem very short! I will include details and photos of the trip to Baxter in my next report.

US Travels and Activities

The last four months of this year have included a number of US mission and ministry activities. **Steve Teel**, president of Baxter Institute, was in Oklahoma in October and I attended presentations and meetings at both **Park Plaza** and **Fort Gibson**.

In early October, Jan and I hosted **Bob and Jane Miranda** from EVO (Vocational Training for Workers, Memorial church of Christ, Houston) as we developed plans for 2018 mission work in Central and South America.

In late October, I presented a mission report and preached at **North Side Church of Christ in Mena, Arkansas**.

In early November, Jan and I traveled to **Michigan, Ohio, and Ohio Valley College in Parkersburg, West Virginia**. Along the way, we visited friends and family and spoke about mission work and what God is doing in Latin America.

We enjoyed attending Homecoming at OVU—we had not been on campus for almost ten years. Here I am standing in front of Smith Hall, part of the dormitory complex that was constructed on North Campus during my tenure as executive vice-president (*picture right*). Despite the challenges and problems that were a part of overseeing the new construction projects on campus, I am encouraged when I return to those places that are a part of my legacy.



I always count it a privilege to give mission reports, talk to church leaders about missions, and share Bible studies. The opportunity to reconnect with numerous friends and brothers and sisters in Christ was an added blessing during the US travels.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Thank you for your interest. Through this work in the churches I visit and encourage, God is making possible thousands of baptisms and dozens of new churches. Through the host congregation (Main and Oklahoma, McAlester, OK), we accept tax-deductible gifts (checks payable to "Church of Christ," memo line "Latin American Missions" or the specific project being funded).

ALL CONTRIBUTIONS SHOULD BE MAILED TO MY ADDRESS (10704 S 89th East Ave, Tulsa, OK 74133), since I handle deposits, acknowledgements, and accounting. If funds are for a specific need or project, please include that information with your gift.

Que Dios lo bendiga (may God bless you),

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Overview of a Guatemalan village. The great cities of Latin America are surrounded by countless villages like the one pictured. All across Latin America, people are receptive to the gospel of Jesus Christ and Christians hunger and thirst for the word of God and encouragement and training in evangelism, healthy church development and effective church leadership.

