

We pray for you that the gracious Spirit of God, the God of ALL Comfort, be ever with you. That you may be filled with confidence and be able to look at the future with boldness and joy!

August 1, 2013

Dearest «DefSalut»

Opportunity knocks!

God is calling us to “strike the ground” for victory!

The prophet Elisha told Joash the king to take hold of his arrows and strike the ground with them—to symbolize the victories God would give him in Syria.

Joash struck the ground—but only three times. Elisha roared at him for stopping short. Now Joash would only emerge victorious three times! He had failed to seize the strategic moment and score as many victories as he could!

Every time I read this passage in 2 Kings 13, I wonder,

What if? Would I recognize the opportunity?

How many times would I strike the ground?

How many times would you strike the ground?

Today, my dear friend, you and I have an opportunity to “strike the ground” time and time again ... many, many times ... in Cuba! *I keep returning there because it is so clear that God has given us this as a place to “strike the ground” for victory!*

I was just there again to launch a new set of 100 churches. Only three weeks earlier on my previous visit, I urged a young pastor to prepare the sites so we could take a look at them and include them in our support strategy. I was pleasantly surprised! A number of sites are starting up as we expected, with one or more exploding cell groups looking to move out of homes into larger facilities.

But the real surprise was to see groups going above and beyond our expectations!

We went into a farm compound where the farmer had a good-sized warehouse. He had moved out his farm equipment and built a platform as an altar at one end and decorated the structure as a church. That evening, he gathered 100 adults and a number of children for the “first service,” which I had the privilege of leading, along with a group who came with me from the U.S.

We praised the Lord for the beautiful values that were bearing fruit in this farmer’s

life. He has been successful with all of his other “crops”—and now he is poised for great success with planting a crop of churches!

The local people who showed up were mostly unchurched, so when the Gospel was shared, a majority prayed to receive the Lord. The mood was very festive as everybody was discovering the joy of coming together to meet with God. A church is born! It is truly made up of people who were “called out” (*ekklesia*) just like in the New Testament.

There were so many other sites, even in a weeklong visit, we couldn’t get to half of them. (Last year, it took more than four months of intensive visitation for our teams to evaluate all the workers!)

Another wonderful highlight of the trip was the commissioning of 37 new church planters. We gathered at the fishing port at Caibarien—a very appropriate location, as they joined the One who said, “I will make you fishers of men”!

How do we find these dynamic church planters?
How do we identify the high-potential leaders?

It’s not simply that they want to get into ministry. It’s not even enough that they are evangelistically minded—which is a rare find in many places these days! The best investment, we’ve discovered, is to support those who are planting churches in a sacrificial way.

These are people who demonstrate with their very lives that they believe God exists and that He is the “Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” They “strike the ground for victory” even at the expense of their own comfort, their own lives.

It was a very happy moment for these servants to come together for commissioning into full-time ministry. To put it into perspective: these are 37 from among some 2,500 who are working as laymen planting churches.

One may ask, “Why pay them at all? Why not just let them go on doing what they are doing?”

We do it because of what we have witnessed: Funding those who are sacrificially planting churches is usually the beginning of a planting movement that results in not merely four or five churches but in a dozen—or even several dozen—churches!

We also know that for every paid “professional” (as the Cubans call them), we get an average of 35 “lay workers” or “lay missionaries” who follow or imitate the “professional.”

***What if** we didn’t support them? Who might never hear the Good News?* When we hear the specific testimonies—how the “lay church planter” is “getting it done,” as they normally put it—their heroism tells me all over again: Helping them does not even qualify as

an “inconvenience.”

Let me give you a one-minute tour of the sacrifices these dedicated young leaders are making:

- Some actually couldn't get to the commissioning service because torrential rains in the west of Cuba have made the rivers too deep to cross. These folks would have to walk for *four hours* just to get to a place where they could *hitch a ride* to join us.
- Some of our workers in the east are limited by transportation. Our brother Alberto preaches five times most weekends. He likes the preaching part, he says—the challenge is the five- to ten-kilometer walk between service locations! (He needs a bike or a motorcycle. As always, we spend where we must. We haven't gotten to this priority yet.)
- Andy is a senior pastor at 28 years of age. His church is exploding; he's building a three-story church building. He has already had to revise the blueprints to add an extra 30 percent to the floor plan because the place packs out! But the biggest excitement is 100 new church plants being launched by his church, with your help. To cover a region of 100 church plants, he needs a car. Currently he has a bike, but he can't cover it on the bike.

On the last stop of the trip, I thought about Bebo. You may recall my telling you about this remarkable man—a 78-year-old gentleman (once a hero of Cuba who helped repel invaders at the Bay of Pigs) who asked if he could plant churches with us. I was leery. Maybe he only wanted to collect some pension pay? I was really uneasy with the prospect of accepting him *or* rejecting him!

Finally, remembering Jesus' parable of the unproductive fig tree (Luke 13:6), I decided to give him a chance. Bebo went on to plant four churches over the next four years! Am I glad I gave him a chance! ***What if?*** I shudder to think that I almost turned him down!

Bebo has gone to be with the Lord, but his young son Daniel is pastoring his father's fourth church. I was invited to speak at this church's retreat on my last day in Cuba. It was also that day that we launched their next 12 daughter churches.

What if I had told Bebo “no”? What opportunities do we miss anytime we reject a passionate, willing-to-sacrifice young leader? *We must take every opportunity to “strike the ground” for victory.*

Jesus says in John 15, “I am the true vine, my father is the vine dresser ... you are the branches.” He compares himself to the other vine described in Isaiah 5. The latter produced sour grapes; the former produces “fruit”—it produces “more fruit”—it produces “*much fruit*.”

The Cubans have this passage at the center in their DNA. They apply it literally: “We are the branches, and if we are not productive, we will be pruned off.” Whether this interpretation is technically and totally accurate, they live and work with an astonishing passion: ***they do not want to be pruned off—they long to be PRODUCTIVE.***

The key to the exhortation Jesus gives us in this passage is to “abide in Him.” If we abide as true branches, we will bear “fruit,” “more fruit” and “much fruit.” The key word *abiding* shows up 11 times in this chapter alone. It actually shows up 40 times in the entire Gospel, and 27 times in John’s epistles. Abiding is BIG! The message is clear, and hugely important: *If we remain in Him and He remains in us, there will be fruit.*

To abide means not simply to be born again, but also to persevere in our faith in Him, and follow in loving obedience to Him.

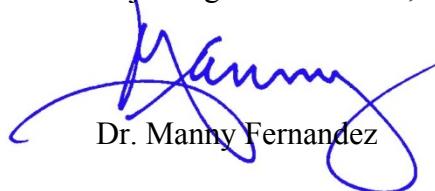
We need to install the “abiding” DNA in our own hearts and lives. Of course, you and I are born again. And I am sure you probably have the faith to go on with Him. But the degree of “fruit”—the question of “more fruit” or “much fruit”—has to do with the “loving obedience” part.

The stories of “much fruit” coming out of Cuba are thrilling. But we cannot settle for the role of applauding spectators. Let us, in loving obedience, remember we are also “attached” to the True Vine.

- We need to stand with our brothers and sisters in Cuba and empower them to be more effective in the work to which they are giving their lives so sacrificially.
- We need to be providing for them, meeting their basic needs, putting wheels under them where needed, and more.

Please let me hear from you right away with a generous gift today to help us reach the fruit that remains ... an entire nation in spiritual need. Let us, in our own way, match the sacrificial service of our brothers and sisters in the field. Thank you. God bless you!

Rejoicing in the Harvest,



Dr. Manny Fernandez

PS. ***What if?*** With your generous help today, we will strike the ground again and again—and keep striking it. We will not miss a single opportunity for victory—for leading the lost to faith in Christ, and building the faith of believers. Thank you for making it possible.