

January 1, 2013

Dear Ministry Prayer Partner,

Christmas is not over!

May the Spirit of Christmas remain fresh in your mind ... so that the indescribable Gift may continue inspiring us to spread the Good News of a Savior for our needy world!

I assure you that this is not my idea — it is God's heartfelt desire for you and me!

In the past few days, I've seen this truth firsthand. I've been with "God's helpers" in the field of Spain — and I am *charged up* to be around these guys!

Bruno and Lydia and their little daughter Janna are on a new assignment. God has called them to a new post — to a work of "Christmas in the New Year" — and it is a thrill to follow them on their journey....

They studied at our school in Spain, and held their first pastoral position in Malaga; then they moved to a ministry post in Langley, British Columbia.

The vision for western Canada was to launch a "train and deploy" ministry just like the ones we've set up in every location where God has called us. "Train and deploy" is not our idea either! Jesus called us to this, in His Great Commission: "Teach them to obey all the things I have commanded you." Bruno shares the same desire.

But soon after we began the project in B.C., the government closed down the work: With an overwhelming influx of people looking for work in Canada, Bruno's visa was not renewed.

Still, Bruno and Lydia "felt no loss"—they simply looked to the Lord for direction. Spain came clearly back into view.

This is where the story gets really exciting for me! As they came back to Spain, word spread like wildfire. Several very reputable churches made diligent efforts to bring them as their senior pastor.

This is a fantastic affirmation of the work we've been doing in Spain all these years. It seems not too long ago, we were an "unknown entity"; people had their doubts about who we were and what we were going to teach. Other schools had been around longer....

Now a decades-old church in Mostoles—which had hired a Spaniard trained in the U.S. at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School—was offering one of the city's top salaries to Bruno and Lydia!

Another city church in an affluent suburb, Las Rozas de Madrid, offered a similar package. In beautiful Granada, a church was offering salary plus housing. Churches in beautiful coastal regions wanted Bruno and Lydia to come and be their beloved pastoral couple.

But to all these offers, Bruno and Lydia said no.

They did not go for the “money packages.”

They were looking to God. They had one question and one question only:

“Where does God want us to be?”

And they ended up going to a “half-salaried” position—“third-salaried” would be more accurate—in the city of Benidorm!

“Why?” I asked Bruno. Because, he replied, there was no Gospel work in the region. It’s overrun with cults. Many of the cities in this region have no Gospel witness whatsoever!

Bruno’s vision here, as before, is a strategy of “train and deploy”—right in the bull’s-eye of the Great Commission. Once they got settled, Bruno’s first call was to us—to arrange for us to join forces with them, and see a great impact of the Gospel in the region.

We have already scheduled two evangelistic campaigns for this year!

I wish you could have been with us on a high mountain peak above Benidorm. It was a charged moment — looking at the great city below us.

We were at the very top of the mountain, where a large cross towers over the summit. We were strategizing, dreaming, praying....

Benidorm has fewer than 100,000 residents—but every year, tourists transform it into a city 15 times its size! An average of 1.5 million people come to Benidorm in the summer months.

From our place on the mountaintop, we could see all the surrounding cities without a Gospel witness. We could also see, amid the vast carpet of buildings, with numerous skyscrapers rising throughout the panorama, one especially large and noticeable building complex: the Jehovah’s Witness regional headquarters! Yes, we have our work cut out for us.

No dread, though ... no worry: We’re excited! God has brought us here!

Of course, we're remembering what we've learned down through the years: Follow-up is king. Without it, we're spinning our wheels. If Christmas is just a "nuisance" that we're glad to be done with, we have the wrong focus on Christmas! Christmas—the celebration of the momentous arrival of the Lamb of God, coming to be slain for our sins—needs to drive us all year long.

But typically, people follow up the grandeur of Christmas with ho-hum, matter-of-fact New Year's resolutions.

- The beauty of Luke 2:11—"For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord"—we follow up with New Year's resolutions like "Lose weight" and "Exercise."
- The majesty of Isaiah 9:6—"...His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace"—gives way to "Get out of debt" or "Volunteer somewhere."

Just one week later, Christmas and its powerful evangelistic purpose are put away along with the ornaments and lights, to be stored out of the way until another brief visit the following year.

What if we changed the tradition, for follow-up's sake—and instead of New Year's resolutions, we adopted "Christmas resolutions"?

This makes logical sense—since we're Christians!

If we act upon the familiar passages of Christmas in the year ahead, it will be more than logical—it will be theological!

Imagine making "O Come O Come Immanuel" more than the ritual of an oft-repeated song. What if we resolve to *live* by it this year?

*...Joy to the world, the Lord is come—let earth receive her King!
...Peace on earth, and mercy mild—God and sinners, reconciled!*

If we can get past the ritual, and realize every day the life-transforming reality of the Christmas message—we will see God mightily at work! I remember how it happened with me, when I was just 7 years old. *The Gospel was truly news to me.* I was surprised to hear from a pastor that salvation was brought about by a personal decision, in a personal conversation with God.

The pastor was not trying to "sell" the idea. Remarkably, he was very matter-of-fact about it. But my heart responded to the amazing news he was sharing! To him it had perhaps become very ordinary, "old news" as they say ... but to me, it was literally life-changing. And the Gospel continues to impact my life!



We need to carry Christmas forward into the New Year ... with the transformational power of its message.

Christmas may be “over,” logically—but many times our logic is our worst enemy. The Lord says: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.... As the heavens are higher than the Earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8,9).

Our logic is limited by our terrestrial mindset. We can’t figure out God beyond what He has chosen to share with us. But as we obey, we gain the victory. We do what God says, and we see the reward.

It was not “logical” for Bruno and Lydia to walk away from the big money.

Best package? Best home? Best city? Their choice was not logical—it was theological: “Where does God want us?”

They chose obedience—to go the place of greatest need, greatest challenge, and therefore greatest opportunity for our great God.

It’s a New Year, but Bruno and Lydia will be proclaiming the glad Christmas tidings—Christ the Savior is born! Please join us. Make a “Christmas resolution”—to declare the risen Savior to a world in need, all year long!

As He saved you by grace through faith ... you are His “work of art”—created in Christ Jesus to perform good works which He prepared in advance for you to do in 2013. Let it be so. Let me hear from you quickly, with your best possible gift of support for the work to which God has called us together. Thank you in advance. God bless you!

With a heart full of anticipation,

Dr. Manny Fernandez

P.S. What will God do through your “Christmas resolution” in this New Year? How many lives will be saved by grace, thanks to your prayerful generosity? I look forward with joy to His great work through us together. Thank you again!