

Tim Drinkard

Reaching the People of Panama

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MINISTRY

The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 16:9, “For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and **there are** many adversaries.” The presence of an open door is always accompanied with adversaries especially in the context of establishing churches. Some of these adversaries can come from within our own ranks and even without as we all know. But we must remind ourselves that when God opens a door, no man can close it. Paul gives us the great purpose of the church in Ephesians 3:10. He explains that the church which was once a mystery, now manifests the wisdom of God in front of the principalities and powers in heavenly places. This last week I witnessed God open a magnificent door which even now is hard to describe.

I just returned from my thirteenth trip to the Darién Province to deliver the great Bible doctrine about the Blood of Christ to our new disciple Chango, who is from the Emberá People. Before this trip we specifically prayed that God would do a great work. We were not prepared for what He was about to do. Almost immediately God gave us a translator for future materials and a connection for purchasing Bible’s in the Emberá language. Both of these prayers God answered within the first three hours of entering the Darién Province. After talking with several believers, we were led to a store house with over two-thousand Bibles in the Emberá language that are immediately available to purchase for four dollars per bible. Also, six months ago, I had written a pamphlet about the love of God in which we distributed to about four-thousand people in this area. Through several contacts the Lord led us to a school teacher who is going to translate this pamphlet which will soon be spread up several rivers in the jungle to about ten other Emberá villages.

Our second day we made our way to an Emberá village called Nueva Vigia. This is a community of about six-hundred people and sits on a river that leads to three more villages. On way to this village we stumbled upon a military post with about three-hundred refugees. These were men and women who sacrificed their lives to walk six days in the jungle from South America into Panama in hopes of reaching the United States. The timing of God was absolutely incredible. U.S. soldiers have been working with the Panamanian police force in an extremely low-key operation to detain these people and begin moving them to the Costa Rican border for processing. God gave me the incredible opportunity to witness to some of them that spoke English. I was able to give the gospel to a man from Haiti and also present the gospel to three young men

from Sri Lanka (which is ten-thousand miles away). The young men from Sri Lanka had to cross two oceans and the entire continent of Africa just to get to South America and begin their journey through the jungle. The man from Haiti told me that the coyotes they paid to lead them through the jungle had stolen their bags and their money which unfortunately is not uncommon. He also told us of the dead bodies of women and children on the trail. People who died of dehydration and other sicknesses. He said, "I have never seen so many dead people in my life." The horror that these men experienced is unspeakable. Yet, according to God's providence in the most difficult time of their entire life, there we stood in front of them. Sharing the hope and love of Jesus Christ, some cold water, and provision for food. The image of the three young men from Sri Lanka will stay in my mind for the rest of my life. They professed to be Hindu's and serve many god's however, I was able to expound upon the love of the God of the Bible and how His great love separates Him from all other God's though the death of His Son Jesus Christ. My hope is they will look back on this day and see that in the most trying time of their lives it was the God of the Bible who sent His servants to show His love towards them. And that moment in time, will be the catalyst for a decision for Christ.

We made our way into the community and met with several key men. This community and others like it had churches at one time. However, they have been dismantled for about ten years. When New Tribes Missions pulled out of the area in the early to mid 90's other organizations came in and began to control the churches. This form of rule stole the liberty, freedom, and autonomy of the local church from these people and about ten years ago all the churches eventually collapsed. The timing of God was absolutely incredible as we sat there with these men. We sat with a remnant of believers which has remained faithful after all of these years. One man said, "we have been praying for revival." They have been praying for help to start churches once again. They asked me to stand and give them my view on the church and my philosophy. In short, I told them that God never intended for the local church to be under the authority of any government or group of men acting as their authority. And that the only way the churches would ever grow, and spread, was if Jesus Christ was given His proper place as the head of the church and not man. Only then would they experience the divine leading of Christ through the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. Shortly after our testimonies you could sense the relief of the men. The women began to smile and laugh, and you could sense the magnificent presence of the Spirit of God. You could literally feel God binding our hearts together for a new work in this area and it was accompanied with a great and magnificent joy. A day I have always dreamed of and I will never forget.

What made this time even more special was that we were also standing in the presence of persecuted Christians. We stood and talked with a family whose house was burned to the ground last month by narcotics traffickers. This community sits right on a narco-trafficking route. In fact we were being watched by some of them in the village and we were told we needed to leave soon. The Lord, the day before, had answered my prayer about getting Bibles in their language and while standing there with these persecuted Christians I had the honor to present to this man a new bible in his own language to

replace his which he had just lost in the fire. I can't explain to you the brevity of this wonderful work that we are getting ready to witness. This area is very dangerous, yet they are pushing on for the gospel of Jesus Christ. I will return to this village in three weeks with the gospel tracts translated, printed, and ready to distribute. Despite the risk and danger, this trip is necessary to equip the existing believers with the tools necessary to see the gospel go forth in preparation for a church to be established.

Because of the extreme diversity and danger in the area I am reaching, the philosophy behind planting churches in this specific part of Darién is going to be a little different. In order to help the Emberá reach the Emberá, I must minimize the intervention of myself from a cultural standpoint, as an American, and also other sources that they view as "outside pressure." The solution to establishing new churches while yet maintaining solid bible doctrine and teaching while honoring the preservation of their cultural heritage is to find property in this area away from where they live. This will allow the people to come and train and then go back to their communities and at the same time relieve my presence as an outsider to keep the growth as natural as possible.

Right now in the Darien, God has opened yet another magnificent door. He has just opened the door for the piece of property I have been praying and searching for. It "just so happens" that the man we are discipling (Chango) is the caretaker for a 1 ½ acre piece of property which sits right on the main highway in the heart of the area of the Province. Similar property in this specific area is selling at \$15/ square meter. That puts the land value at roughly \$90,000.00. But the landowner who is from Panama and also a Baptist missionary, is offering the land to us for a fraction, literally. I can purchase the property right now for \$11,000.00 which included costs for taxes, lawyer, and title work. Praise God! The property needs cleared and prepared for future conferences as well so any monies given over this amount will be used to develop the property for future use.

As the Apostle Paul said, "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and **there are** many adversaries." I am writing you to tell you that a great door has been opened by the hand of God. Yes, there are adversaries but when God's people get behind God's work, we become more than conquerors through Him that loves us. I am writing and asking if you would make a donation and give a special one-time offering to get behind the work of God for the Emberá People. This property is in a very strategic location and among many indigenous peoples. It will be used to magnify the name of Christ for many years to come. I believe with all of my heart that securing this land is our part of joining hands with the Lord by faith for what He is going to do. I pray the Lord will touch your heart for this. May the name of Christ be lifted up, magnified, and glorified from the heart of Panama's notorious Darien Province through the hearts and lives of the Emberá People.

Your missionary,
Tim Drinkard