

July 1996



INTERNATIONAL



Tim with Becky and Umberto Ramirez, whose home we will be taking care of while they're in the States.

We hope you've enjoyed hearing some of our experiences in our last few letters. This month I thought I'd talk about something more personal, some thoughts. We couldn't begin to tell you all the new or fresh ideas and perspectives we've gained in these months. But there are two books that have been very influential in my life lately: *The Beautiful Side of Evil* by Johanna Michaelsen and *The Jesus I Never Knew* by Philip Yancey.

In March I took a home and garden tour to see behind the walls around the homes in Cuernavaca. Through a series of events, including my missing the tour I had planned on taking, God orchestrated it so that one of the ladies in my tour group turned out to be an author I had read because her first book, *The Beautiful Side of Evil*, was required reading for a missions class at Reformed Theological Seminary. The book relates her period of working with an indigenous healer, or *curandero*, here in Mexico and her search to find the source of the power she was seeing. Her story (she gave me copies of portions that have been translated into Spanish) has opened

up numerous conversations on a spiritual level. It seems that here in Mexico everyone has had some kind of experience with the supernatural, ranging from horoscopes and having tea leaves or tarot cards read to getting a *limpieza* (a ritual cleansing from any evil influences in your life.) Johanna, and the materials she has given us have been a helpful complement to some of the training we received about the spiritual world before moving to Mexico.

As I've talked with people about their search for help from this type of supernatural power the twin issues of trust and control often surface — do I trust that God will take care of me, or do I need to know the future? Do I want to control my life by whatever means necessary, or am I willing to trust God? Or even harder, do I trust that God is good even if really bad things happen in my life? The issue hasn't changed since the garden of Eden: do I trust God or do I look out for myself? Those who live in poverty and lack of resources respond eagerly to this source of hope, but only God gives gifts freely. Satan never gives anything without exacting stiff payment.

I wish I could mail you a copy of *The Jesus I Never Knew* by Philip Yancey (along with the time to read it!). So often when I read about Jesus in the Gospels I'm frustrated because my familiarity with the stories keeps them from impacting me. By applying his journalistic approach to Jesus, Yancey helps us see Him freshly and powerfully. C.S. Lewis said that people often fail when they try to be original, but when someone concentrates on the truth they usually end up being original. Yancey concentrates on the Truth and ends up with the impact of originality.

The chapter on Jesus' temptation in the desert was particularly powerful for me as we are in the role of learners here in Mexico with the hope of being used by God here. Yancey describes the essence of the temptations: "Satan tempted the Son of God to change the rules and achieve his goals by a dazzling, shortcut method" (p. 69). As I come across the many huge Catholic churches dotting the countryside and filling the cities, I often wonder what Mexico would be like now if Catholics had taken the slow, resistible path of introducing the Indians to God's love poured out in Christ, instead of taking the path of power, forcing slave-like labor to construct the churches and at times conversion upon pain of death. But then I find myself thinking with Yancey:

"I am quick to diagnose these flaws. Yet when I turn from church history and examine myself, I find that I too am vulnerable to the Temptation. I lack the willpower to resist shortcut solutions to human needs. I lack the patience to allow God to work in a slow, 'gentlemanly' way. I want to seize control myself, to compel others to help accomplish the causes I believe in" (p. 81).

Love, trust, patience, willpower, and above all the intimacy with God that produces the fruit of the Spirit — without these we could do much more harm than good here. It's a tall and intimidating order and we know that we can't do it by ourselves. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14).

Thank you for working together with us,

Tim & Annette