

Lessons from Guatemala

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, May 4, 2025

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us. Whether you are here in person or joining via the livestream you are most welcome. Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take notes as you like. We have much to cover in a short space of time.

SETTING THE STAGE

NOTE 1 – It is my joy once again to be with you all. We had a blessed and fruitful time of ministry in Guatemala. Allow me to note: **a)** you should be proud of the team and the work they accomplished in a short space of time; **b)** thank you for your prayers and support (all of which served to make this trip possible); and **c)** thank you to those who carried on the work of this local assembly in our absence (e.g., speaker, worship team, facilities, etc.).

NOTE 2 – Many have asked for a report on the ministry accomplished in Guatemala, along with testimonies. Since many are away today due to the Women's Retreat and since next Sunday is Mother's Day Weekend, we will dedicate the whole of Sunday, May 18, to a time of testimony and more. You will hear the full account. Thus said, today I do want to offer some spoiler-free musings on lessons gleaned by this minister while traveling.

NOTE 3 – We spent an inordinate amount of time traveling to, amidst and from Guatemala. In total we spent some sixty hours of our nine days traveling by plane, bus, pickup, car, etc. (i.e., everything except a donkey)! Thus said, the Lord spoke quite a bit to my heart and mind as we traveled the roadways and more of Guatemala. Would you like to hear a bit about what resonated within my heart and mind? Great! Please note the following:

LESSONS FROM GUATEMALA

1) Journey into the Unknown

Every road was a journey into the unknown. It was my first time there and I had zero idea where we were. Every turn would lead to a new, foreign area. You never knew where each main road and turn would take you!

Life is much this way. Each day is a journey into the unknown! Sure, we can plan all we like, but no one fully knows what each day might bring. When a day starts one can only imagine what encounters and/or experiences we will have. Thus, there is a certain uncertainty in life, whether it be in the nation of Guatemala or in the USA.

Proverbs 16:9 (NIV)

9 In their hearts humans plan their course,
but the Lord establishes [directs] their steps.

Q. Do you think anyone could have foreseen the following course of events?

Acts 3:1–10

1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. 2 Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. 4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” 5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

6 Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” 7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. 8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. 9 When all the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

2) Blazing a Trail

If you are driving on any roadway, it is a path made possible by the work of another. Every trail or highway was blazed by the energy and investment of another. This is true in the United States of America. This is also true, and even more remarkable, in a country like Guatemala (i.e., due to the terrain and topography; mountainous)!

This has spiritual implications. You are likely here, in Christ, because of the work someone else has done. Someone prayed for you—even generations past. Someone shared Christ with you. Moreover, you are where you are in terms of maturity because of the energy or investment of another (i.e., parent, mentor, pastor, etc.).

2 Timothy 1:3–5

3 I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. 4 Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. 5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

3) Ups and Downs & Twists and Turns

Guatemala is a place of ups-and-downs—mountaintops and deep valleys. What goes up must come down, etc. Quite often I would marvel at the steep inclines and declines presented within the mountains terrain. Moreover, I would marvel at the switchbacks carved into the mountains to make travel possible (zigs and zags).

Isn’t this how life is. Isn’t there a seasonal nature to life and living. Are there not deep valleys and mountaintops? Are there not unexpected twists and/or turns carved into the journey of our existence, prepared by God Himself! As I considered these elements on the highways and—mainly—byways of Guatemala, I thought of the following:

Psalm 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
 he leads me beside quiet waters,
 3 he refreshes my soul.
 He guides me along the right paths
 for his name's sake.
 4 Even though I walk
 through the darkest valley,
 I will fear no evil,
 for you are with me;
 your rod and your staff,
 they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me
 in the presence of my enemies.
 You anoint my head with oil;
 my cup overflows.

6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me
 all the days of my life,
 and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
 forever.

Q. Can you not feel the movement herein?

4) Rocks Along the Way

Every now and then our bus-driver, Mario, would have to stop the bus to dislodge a rock stuck in the tire. Mario was surgical with the hammer he wielded in such moments! It was a bit common on more rural roads for these impediments to hinder our progress, requiring physical remediation and removal (i.e., again, by hammer).

I think this is true of the journey of life. How often are we going along swimmingly until some matter of sinfulness or a bad attitude creeps in and begins to hinder? What are we to do when such matters occur (and they will)? Stop before God and practice some spiritual removal and remediation in Christ (i.e., deal with the impediments).

Hebrews 12:1

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

1 John 1:9

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

5) Road Closures and the Unexpected

Road closures are a common phenomenon in Guatemala. Said closures may be the result of nature, as earthquakes and heavy rainfall bring about landslides, rock falls, etc., making roadways impassible. Closures may also be the result of political unrest/protest, which we experienced and had to contend with. Such realities mean that plans change and detours result. One has to be flexible and ready for the unexpected in Guatemala!

This is similar to life. Sometimes it seems that plans change on a dime, and you are forced to shift for reasons utterly beyond your control (i.e., myriad elements). All we can do in such times is practice patient flexibility and make the necessary detour and more. What other option(s) do you really have? We must follow the Spirit!

Q. Have you ever considered that God strategically and sovereignly utilizes roadblocks?

Acts 16:6

6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Proverbs 16:9 (NIV)

9 In their hearts humans plan their course,
but the Lord establishes [directs] their steps.

6) Travel Matters

Thus said, how we traveled matters. When confronted with unexpected delays, detours and/or opposing forces, we had a choice in how we responded. We could not control the circumstances we faced, but we could control ourselves amid them. We could have chosen to traffic in complaint, grumbling, murmur or stubbornness (peril). Yet we could have also chosen to traffic in prayer, celebration, thanksgiving and more. Praise God we did well!

This speaks to me. We cannot control the circumstances we face. We can only control our response accordingly. This means that we can choose wisely or poorly, but each comes pros and cons. Ultimately, in life, how you travel matters! How do you handle unexpected delays, detours and opposing forces? Beware a wrong response!

Q. How did murmur and complaint work for the Hebrews of the Exodus?

1 Corinthians 10:1–11

1 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. 2 They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 3 They all ate the same spiritual food 4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

6 Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.” 8 We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. 9 We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. 10 And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. 11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.

7) The Place of Faith

Traveling in Guatemala, via car or pickup, is an exercise of faith in the driver. Since we could not legally drive—and really would not want to—in such a place, we were reliant upon several drivers (i.e., Mario and Davis, etc.). Every time we got in the car we had to trust in wisdom, care, and capacity of the figures who navigated the trek.

Is this not true of our lives? We have to trust in the ability, care and wisdom of the Lord as we navigate this life. Every day we wake up and live this life we have a fresh opportunity to trust the Lord and place our faith in Him. Thankfully, our God is eminently qualified, comes with much experience, and the best there is at what He does!

Proverbs 3:5–6

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
6 in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.

8) The Place of Companionship

One of the best parts of a missions trip is the immediate bond that is forged between members of the team. You will do things on a missions trip for others above-and-beyond what you would do in the states (e.g., keys). What you feel toward one another deepens, as you truly come to know others to a higher degree in such work. There is no greater joy than sharing real connection on such a journey (e.g., lyvol in the back of Davis’s pickup).

This speaks to me. As we live this life we have the pleasure of doing so with others. Are you truly so connected?

Acts 2:42–47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

9) The Place of Prayer

Traveling in Guatemala on a missions trip compels prayer. Beyond the dangers of the road and the unknown, there were spiritual forces arrayed against us. I have never felt to pray more than on this trip, and even over the smallest of things! In fact, I think some of us walked away with a far deeper appreciation for prayer than before.

We need prayer amidst the journeys of our lives. How much do we take for granted the ability to call on God? To what degree are we aware of the power, privilege and pleasure of prayer. This is an area I want to do better!

1 Thessalonians 5:17

17 pray continually [without ceasing] . . .

Philippians 4:6–7

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

10) Contrasts

I was struck by the contrasts experienced while traveling in Guatemala. Firstly, we could speak of the contrast of nature (beauty) and human creation (poverty). Secondly, we could speak of the contrast between life-giving moments (satisfaction of service or laughter) and life-ending moments (death). Both things occurred in parallel!

Isn't life this way. Rick Warren notes that life often flows along parallel tracks (i.e., both pain and joy, etc.). This may be a reality that is difficult to accept, but it's very much often the case. These texts speak to me in kind:

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:28, 35, 37–39

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

11) Length of Travel

It seems in Guatemala everything takes longer than expected when traveling. I recall the first day I asked Davis how much longer to our destination—after an hour of driving—and he smiled and said, “Ten more minutes.” Only later did I come to understand that “ten minutes” in Guatemala means two hours. Everything on Guatemala time is ten more minutes. Sometimes the length of the travel is enhanced by the accompanying pain!

Life is much this way. The Lord moves slowly and things almost never seem to happen on our timeline. Of all the words in the Bible that I love, patience and wait are not high on my list (i.e., especially as a New-Englander)! However, serving the Lord will require patience and waiting, so we must wait with a good attitude (prior point).

Psalm 46:10

10 He says, “Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.”

Isaiah 40:28–31

28 Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.
29 He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
30 Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
31 but those who hope in [i.e., wait on] the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

12) Destinations

It was dear Miley Cyrus who said it’s about the climb and not the destination. I happen to largely disagree. Often in Guatemala the reward for making a long trek was the beauty of the destination and the joy of the work. The parsonage we built was 2+ hours from the hotel, but I have never seen so breathtaking a view. Unbelievable!

What makes the journey of this life worth it? It’s the ultimate destination. Eternal life; connection; heaven, etc.

2 Timothy 4:6–8

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

CONCLUSION

NOTE 1 – I would call you to worship God through your giving. Please feel free to give online or in person.

NOTE 2 – Check out our church website for upcoming events and beyond (www.NewLifeBarre.org).

NOTE 3 – Men's Breakfast on Saturday, May 10, at 9am. Our Work-Day to Follow @ 10:30am.

NOTE 4 – Iron Sharpens Iron on Saturday, May 17. Finalization of the roster today.

NOTE 5 – Mother's Day Sunday on May 11 and G. Testimony on May 18.

Numbers 6:24–26

24 The Lord bless you

and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you

and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you

and give you peace.