

REAP Peru May 2008 Trip Journal

Howdy from Iquitos May 25, 2008

Dear REAP Team Friends,

My name is Kristen and this is my first trip to Peru. As the designated trip journalist, I am also the designated trip blogger. I am honored!

As you probably know, we left DFW on Thursday afternoon, flew through Houston (where we encountered a former WWE wrestler named X-Pac, seriously! Ask Jake and Cody about that one!), flew through Lima (where we spent the evening in the airport food court telling ridiculously silly jokes and learning to laugh together as a team), and arrived in Iquitos about 7a.m. Friday morning. Our travel could not have gone more smoothly, and we were thrilled to see that all of our luggage arrived with us. We checked into our hotel and promptly went to napping until noon. Actually, I think Jake had to do some work, but the rest of us slept. Poor trip leader! At noon, Pastor Richar came and joined us for lunch at Ari's Burger. We spent the rest of the afternoon making arrangements for the boats, exchanging our dollars for local currency, and resting a little more. After dinner, we met with Richar and another pastor, Leopolo, from the local seminary for a sweet time of group prayer. We did not stay up very late, but went to bed for a full night's rest.

Saturday has been a very productive day as well. Pastor Richar's wife, Claudia, and two other sisters from their church helped us shop in the market for all of the food and supplies we will need on our trip into the jungle. Those women are bargain hunters, and I was so blessed to see what good stewards God has provided to watch over the funds of this ministry. For Cody, Andrew, and Mark, this was their first time in an open air market. There was much to see, and hear, and smell! Jake and Richar left us for a time to check on the boat and joyfully report that God has granted us favor and the cost is not as high as they had feared. After lunch and a short siesta, Bethany took all of us but Jake to a "zoo". Only the pictures will really be able to tell that story. We will have to share them with you when we return. We held sloths, a boa constrictor, turtles, baby alligators, monkeys, and a few other animals I'm not entirely sure about.

One of the biggest blessings to me today has been hearing from three of our teammates how eager they are to head out tomorrow. We all realize that these days of preparation are necessary, and that the hard part of this trip really hasn't begun, but it's so good to know that we are aware of our purpose and eager to fulfill it!

I will close by sharing with you some of our prayer requests as I have tried to capture them from our conversations and times together ...

- That we would know and understand the depths of God's love for us (Ephesians 1)
- "I just want God to use me."
- To be more in awe of God's glory and grace than of my fears and the sorrows of the world
- Focus: "It's nice to follow God from the beginning instead of Him having to bring us back around."
- Make us aware of what we value or love more than you and help us to release that.
- That people we encounter will be responsive to the message we preach
- Don't let us do anything in our own strength but work as you empower us
- May we be compelled to share God's glory with a people dying to know!

Pevas (Sunday, Monday, Tuesday) June 2, 2008

Six and a half hours by motor boat, mostly in the rain, brought us to Pevas. This was a rough journey, but we survived with lots of laughter. Casa de la Loma is more or less a hostel in Pevas, and our home for Sunday and Monday night once we realized we wouldn't make it all the way to San Francisco. We arrived right as the sun set and were instantly attacked by mosquitoes — their first taste of Gringo blood since January, I guess! It is quite a trek up a hill on some stairs and a narrow pathway with your luggage on your back, but we all did it. I was relieved to see we had a toilet and running water even if it was all cold. The “hermanas” (our cooks for the week) set right to work fixing dinner for all of us. This was our first glimpse of how tirelessly they would work all week long. We cannot say enough great things about Aurora and Esther — God's gifts to us this week! They surprised us all with the spread they put out that first night. We had milanesa sandwiches that would rival Chick-fil-A anyway!

We spent Monday morning in Santa Lucia. Pastor Leopoldo, one of our Peruvian friends, held church first, then taught a “new believers” class about tithing and baptism before the hermanas served lunch for everyone. Bethany helped our Peruvian teammates, Ketty and Ivan, with the children's service. She did such a wonderful job involving them in the story time, too. Mark and Andrew played soccer with the young boys for a while, and right after lunch, before we got on the boats, Jake baptized two young women who gave sweet testimonies of conversion.

When the boats pulled away, we were so tired and sweaty, I just wanted to be done for the day, but Richar gave us about 45 minutes back at Casa de la Loma to refresh before heading over to Piri. We arrived in Piri about four o'clock but found mostly children there. They responded to the songs and story Leo and Ketty shared with them, then they came outside to play. Andrew, Cody, and Mark entertained them with bubbles, English “lessons” and finally by filling their own pockets with candy before taking off on a dash around the community soccer field, chased by all the children. It was hilariously funny.

Piri was by far the most difficult village we saw this week. While we had a great time with the children, those who have been in this village before were discouraged that they were again unable to connect on any significant level with the adults. What struck me most as we walked away was the awareness that there are SO MANY people in the Amazon Basin who need to hear about the Lord. For whatever reason, God has seen fit to make Himself known to the people of Piri, but currently, they seem less than interested in knowing Him. Please join us in praying for a fresh desire among these villagers to know the Lord and even to make Him known.

We spent the first half of Tuesday in Mangual. The adults met in the home of one of the village elders, a long time believer. The children went to a home next door. Some of the women from Santa Lucia joined us to meet with the people at Mangual. We hope they will continue reaching out to these neighbors. When we left there, we traveled another two hours to San Francisco.

San Francisco (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday)

In San Francisco we slept at the pastor's home. There were not beds available, but we used the space they gave us to hang up hammocks. It was quite a sight to see all four guys laying in their hammocks strung up side by side in one small room.

We discovered that a favorite pastime in San Francisco is to play volleyball. Bethany and I were invited to play right after we arrived. There were only two problems with this invitation. 1) They use a “pay to play” rule to keep things competitive. (I am not very competitive, but I did want to spend time with folks. 2) Their court is more or less a mud pit!

On Wednesday morning, we split our team in half — Cody, Jake, myself, Leo, Ketty, and Esther went to Remanzo while Bethany, Andrew, Mark, Richar, Aurora, and Ivan went to Santa Isabella. The schedule was the same as in the first two villages. We sang together, Leo or Richar preached, we took the children to “kid’s church” and the adults stayed for a teaching time. In both villages we ran out of food before any of the missionaries got to eat, but I’m not gonna lie, I wasn’t very disappointed about missing out on “tuna spaghetti” over rice.

Wednesday afternoon we played a LOT more volleyball. The six Americans played a team of Peruvians. We lost, but we had a great time and entertained the community as well. That night, we ate dinner at 6:00 p.m. as soon as it was dark. The mosquitos were so thick that night, we went upstairs and turned our lights out hoping to hide from them!

While we were sitting in the dark, we talked about the things God was teaching us and some of our thoughts about the Yagua people. Some of what was shared included:

- Lamentations 3:21-23 ... Because of the Lord’s great love we are NOT consumed!
- I Corinthians 3:6 ... God caused the growth ... We said when we started out that we would not worry about results, but as we grow increasingly weary, it is difficult not to wonder what it’s all about, wanting to see results, but it is good to remember that the growth is not our responsibility anyway.
- We talked about how there are so few people in the Amazon who know Jesus as Lord, yet God has chosen to reveal Himself, to make Himself known to the Yagua. There was such a spiritual battle going into this trip that I must believe it has great significance whether I can see it or not.

On Thursday, we split up again, the first group going to Condor, the second going to Santa Rosa with a similar schedule as previous days.

Genuine Sacrifice

From my journal on Thursday, May 29, 2008 ...

Many times this week I have been guilty of not seeing our Peruvian friends as missionaries, too. Today, I have been thoroughly corrected. Leopoldo says that 17 people (adults) gave their lives to Jesus this morning in Condor. One of the men is the husband of the town’s teacher. He was very excited about his new faith in Christ and immediately spoke of building a meeting place for the church here. He told us he didn’t own a Bible, and we didn’t have any with us in Spanish. I asked Leo if any of his team (the Peruvians) would be willing to give their Bible and we would replace it when we get back to Iquitos on Friday. He told me his is very old and had too much personal significance, but maybe Ketty would give hers. He went over to her bag and found it. It was a paperback Bible with several passages underlined, but it didn’t appear terribly special to any of us. Leo called Ketty over and asked her about giving to our new brother in Christ. She hesitated but quickly conceded. Jake was telling me he wanted me to explain this sacrifice to our new brother, when Ketty walked over, took the Bible from Leo’s hand, and walked up to the new Believer herself. She held the Bible close to her, looking at him and saying carefully, “This is the word of God. It is my Bible, and it is very special to me, but I am making it a gift to you, so that you can read it, learn it, practice what it says ...”

I couldn’t help the tears that filled my eyes as I quietly translated this exchange for the others near me. I looked up to realize I wasn’t the only one fighting emotion. Ketty’s gift taught all of us so much that day.

Condor

It turns out that one of the “new believers” in Condor is actually a pastor’s son who gave his life to the Lord about seven years ago, but has been out of fellowship with the Lord or other believers for a while now. He was so excited about getting others in the village to gather for services, Bible study, fellowship, and accountability. We must pray he follows through!

Condor, a village we expected little from, may be the next church God plants in this region! The most exciting part of our conversation was when I talked to him about all of the people in the Amazon Basin who don’t yet know of Jesus Christ. I told him, “We Americans are only here for a short time and cannot reach very many,” and he finished my sentence, “but we live here and can reach many!”

Praying In the Gap

Here’s our list of things to help us all continue praying for the Yagua people and our continuing ministry there:

- Our relationship with Leopoldo and the seminary in Iquitos.
- Wisdom regarding finances and how to handle all of the requests for help as well as encouraging the churches to grow to become self sufficient.
- Condor establishing a new church.
- A solution regarding how to get our Peruvian friends into the villages at least once a month.
- Richar and Leo developing relationships with other Peruvian pastors and believers who will get involved in future Yagua outreach.
- That the seeds that were planted will take root and those new believers will be discipled.
- Salvation of Abelardo and Judy in Pevas.
- Clairet and Marillelin who were baptized at Santa Lucia, that they will continue to grow.
- That the sense of darkness and hopelessness will lift in Piri.
- That the church in Mangual will begin meeting regularly.