



## Turn! Turn! Turn!

Before The Book of Ecclesiastes, with its poignant lessons on the many seasons of life, made it to my radar screen, the lingering melody of The Byrds' song Turn! Turn! Turn! was etched in my brain. Some of the seasons foretold haunted me then, as the specter of Honduras's future haunts me today. Yet, its message dared me to hope then, as I dare to hope today for a new and healing season of this long-devastated nation.

We have not missed many seasons of that song since we first made our way through the Linaca Valley in 1998. Several weeks ago a knock at the door marked our latest Turn. It was the lawyer for the bus company, who a year ago made a phone call at 10:30 at night to threaten the lives of our center directors and Jose and me - all because we wanted his brother-in-law, a bus driver, to stop abusing our teens.

Now, after losing two separate trials, the lawyer's brother-in-law was found guilty of 19 separate counts of child abuse that each carried a possible prison sentence of 4 years apiece. Do the math. The bus driver was facing up to 76 years in prison. Waving the proverbial white flag, the once menacing lawyer, now came begging for mercy on his family member.

Last year, when the bus driver's actions first came to our attention, we tried every means at our disposal to come to a peaceable solution. Left with no options, we presented our complaint to the District Attorney who pressed charges against the driver. During the months after that, the bus driver, his company, and the lawyer attempted to thwart our efforts to find our kids safe passage to school every step of the way.

Preparing for war, we never gave up the hope that one day we could sit and reason together for the good of the community. Now, that day was at hand, with the lawyer proffering an olive branch instead of threats.

Of course, the offended students and their parents would have the final say in this matter. But it seemed agreeable to us that if the bus driver made a public apology to each teen and parent and reimbursed all trial costs to our foundation

we would agree to a process of reconciliation, whereby the bus driver eventually could go free of the charges. Finally, we needed assurance that when our long-awaited bus permit arrived, that no one in the bus company would interfere with the safe passage of our center's teens to and from school. Agreeing that these requests were more than fair, the lawyer gratefully took his leave to inform his brother-in-law of the potential accord.

On the day before the driver's final hearing we met with the teens and their parents to get their feedback about his fate. School had already begun for 2011 and we still did not have our bus permit... Some of the teens and parents were quite disheartened that 8 months after the bus arrived, the teens started the school year without suitable transportation. This fact could make the case for reconciliation all the more unpalatable to the teens and their parents.

In early February, on one of his many trips to the capitol of Tegucigalpa to obtain the bus permit, our lawyer Henry had seen the completed paperwork. But the authorities told him to come back the next day, "prepared." Although Henry knew perfectly well what prepared implied, when pressing for a definition of the word, no explanation was given. He walked out infuriated.

Of course, prepared, meant cold hard cash in the form of a kickback. Henry was adamant that these crooks not be handed the bread of poor children to satisfy their corrupt greed. A principled Honduran businessman and his wife were outraged at the treatment our organization had received. They offered to send their personal lawyer to check into the situation.

According to our friends' lawyer, when he asked to see the paperwork for our foundation's bus permit, *poof!* the file had totally disappeared! That was the last we heard of our permit as we sat down with the weary teens and parents the day before the driver's final hearing.

Part of what we offer our center teens, is leadership training in how to conduct their lives with a solid moral framework. And so we began our meeting with a question that is one of our

foundational truths, gleaned from the best leader that we know, Jesus of Nazareth. "What is our ministry?" Jose posited to the teens present. All hands shot up. "Our ministry is reconciliation," Chiki answered solemnly. "And how does that truth apply in this case?" Jose added.

"Making friends of those who were once our enemies," piped up another adolescent. The room was silent for a minute as everyone digested these words. Truth counts for little if it is not lived out.

Summing up the litany of abuses heaped on us by the bus company, Jose spelled out in detail the saga of the considerable dangers, heartache, financial and emotional toll the bus driver and his family's actions had wrought since April of last year. Everyone nodded in disgust as each fact was recounted. It was a heinous list indeed.

Jose then recounted the most recent meeting with the lawyer who was pleading for mercy for his brother-in-law. He outlined the conditions for reconciliation between the two sides that were agreed upon and asked the parents and teens to add anything else they felt was necessary. The floor was then opened up for comments.

The teens who were forced off the bus and had to walk miles on dangerous roads in the dark, the girls who were attacked on the way home from school, the ones who were arbitrarily left behind at the bus stop and missed school, the ones who were taunted, the ones who were forced to get up at 3 in the morning to make their way to school, the ones who were splashed with muddy water by the bus driver, the staff members whose lives and family were threatened, the teens who were forced to bicycle or walk on days when it was so hot and dusty not even the starving dogs moved to check out a discarded scrap of food, spoke from their hearts.

It was astonishing to witness those who suffered the worst at the hands of the bus driver, were the first to offer him mercy. "Since our ministry is to reconcile with our enemies, who are we not to forgive?" stated one teen.



behind were the D.A., our lawyer, and the defense attorney.

Before taking her leave, the bus driver's wife snorted a final warning at us, "You WON'T get that permit, but even if you do, I could never guarantee your safe passage. I

"Yes," chimed in another, "None of us are perfect. How can we withhold forgiveness?" And so it went - each parent and teen taking a turn to pronounce their willingness not to have their abuser put in prison, but to offer him redemption.

Nidia, whose family was threatened, and whose husband could have been sent to jail because of the false accusations of the bus driver against him, addressed the group. "About a year ago, we sat in this room and tried to figure out a way to defend ourselves against the actions of this man." Smiling broadly at the irony of the statement she was about to make, Nidia continued, "Today we sit here and try to find a way to let him go free."

Tell me young people of this caliber cannot make a difference in their nation?

The next morning we took three parents to the courthouse as witnesses to confirm that everyone was agreed on the process of reconciliation - if the bus driver agreed to the demands we outlined.

The lawyer for the bus driver appeared for the hearing dressed in a short-sleeved shirt and jeans. He greeted us rather nervously, his mood a sharp contrast to the last meeting. It did not take long to understand the source of his discomfort. The lawyer's sister (who is the bus driver's wife) strode up to us scowling, radiating an attitude of contempt. Her husband sat on a bench a few feet away. His eyes never looked up.

Stating we would "NEVER get a permit" to drive our bus in Linaca, the bus driver's wife went on to claim the teens in our center belonged to her and we had no right to interfere with her business. Her attitude escalated until we could see that our good faith offer had been stridently rejected.

Soon after that unsettling interchange we were led past handcuffed criminals awaiting sentencing, to an open room. Sitting in the far corner was the District Attorney who had filed the abuse charges on behalf of the 19 teens. The wife of the bus driver was standing behind her brother fuming, as the D.A. leaned in toward him, her firm gestures

revealed a lot of passion in whatever she was trying to explain to the two of them.

As we took our seats in the crowded hallway of the large room, the D.A.'s voice was rising to a pitched fervor, "Why on earth are you not taking this generous offer of reconciliation? I have never heard of such a thing in all my years of practice! And, why is the defendant not making this decision for himself? He is not an imbecile or a mental deficient! You are his lawyer, for goodness sake! You are required to make decisions in the best interest of your client! Why are you allowing this woman to condemn her husband as a criminal when he could walk out of here a free man with all his rights restored?" The D.A.'s words seemed to strike the lawyer like daggers. He flinched and hung his head.

During the D.A.'s outburst, the ruckus in our corner of the room attracted so much attention that one of "The Rangers" stopped by to see what all the fuss was about. The Rangers are a distinct class of judges who happen to resemble characters out of the Wild West. They sport 45's tucked into their pants, cowboy boots, and often a Stetson. I assumed The Ranger hovering about our table was the judge in our hearing. But he was merely curious about the Gringos in the room and the thoroughly irritated D.A. He looked us all up and down and eavesdropped on the conversation for a minute.

At a loss for words, the defeated lawyer for the bus driver shrugged his shoulders, but said nothing. His sister paced behind him huffing and puffing, her red face twisted in anger. Eventually the lawyer offered apologies to us, declaring he was truly sorry for this result. He went on at length to tell us he was a Christian man who had come to us in good faith. He thought his family would be pleased with the arrangement drawn up, but that was not to be. There was nothing more he could do... At those words, his sister sneered in triumph behind his back.

We followed The Ranger out of the room; he was shaking his head in disbelief all the way. Left

have *family* you know, and they won't stand by for this."

As we waited in the hallway, some of "the family" strode in to stand vigil as her husband's fate was being decided. None of them spoke to her husband. It was so surreal to watch this man who had been offered freedom, yet in a few minutes would be declared a felon, seemingly because his wife wanted it that way. He would never be able to vote, nor to obtain a loan, nor apply for a passport. The condemned man sat alone looking at the floor as his wife joked with her brothers a few feet away...

Forty-five minutes later the lawyers filed out. The bus driver's fate was sealed. He was declared a felon. He faces prison and/or a fine that will likely amount to more than he would have paid to reimburse our lawyers fees. These obstinate souls chose to condemn a man rather than apologize to the people they considered unworthy.

I thought to myself, the book of Ecclesiastes needed another line - A time to be a complete fool.

Like The Byrds song, we experienced our time of war most of last year. We could not allow anyone to abuse our children and trample their basic human rights. But suddenly there was a new season upon us and we turned to embrace it. For us, it was not too late for peace. But for the ones offered a way out, their own prison of hate and pride slammed that door behind them.

Yet, we dare to hope for the day when all of Honduras will choose reconciliation and freedom over factions and imprisonment. The rich are imprisoned by the trappings of wealth and their blindness to the treasure in the children of the most abandoned villages. The poor are imprisoned by their poverty of vision. But in the little village of Linaca, our teens are leading the charge to open the eyes of the rich and the poor.

Oh, by the way, the very next day after the bus company rejected the offer of reconciliation our bus permit was issued...

## NEEDS AND CHALLENGES AND MATTERS FOR PRAYER

### ANOTHER MATCHING GRANT FOR THE KIDS!

A generous partner has put up a \$20,000 matching grant for the children's center. We have matched \$5,000 of this grant. Our most pressing need are general funds to run the center and our teen scholarships that costs \$50 per month, per teen. This covers our bus service, uniforms, books, and matriculation fees. In return our teens give 10 hours of service a week, tutoring children in the center, and doing a variety of community projects. The hard work and example of our teens will inspire young and old, rich and poor to come together for the benefit of all.

### DESIGNATED GIVING GOES 100% WHERE SPECIFIED

World Resources Group is unique among non-profits. Specified donations to the children go 100% to the fund designated and are 100% tax deductible. Undesignated giving is used where the Board of Directors deems the need to be greatest. With the little we have been given, the miracles have flowed. If you know of friends or corporate sponsors either in the U.S. or in Honduras that might help us reach our goals, please send this newsletter along!