

# When Significant Spiritual Warfare Occurs on the Mission Field

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On Monday, May 19, 2014, there were twenty-five minds in the Miami airport that were all thinking something along the lines of, “The departure date is here. The trip is finally underway.” After over a semester of preparing and packing all the medications and supplies the week before, we were ready to be in Costa Rica and get to work. We were anticipating being able to apply our classroom instruction as we conducted medical clinics with the local physicians at a church and our camp. Although we were a large group with many suitcases, check-in went quickly. In spite of the early hour, we were all excited and smiling as we gathered for a group picture before going through security, which was trouble-free. The flight was

uneventful, and like typical tourists, our faces were against the windows and our cameras were out as soon as we landed. Nothing was on our minds except how beautiful the country was. The checked bags were already lined up for us when we arrived at the carousel, so all we had to do was get through customs. It seemed like everything was going smoothly...

None of us will forget that moment when we realized something was wrong. Half of the team’s bags were processed without a hitch, but the rest of our bags of precious medications and supplies were flagged and taken to the side to be physically examined. As soon as the inspectors saw the medications it became evident that there was a problem. The

trip leaders provided them with all our paperwork, including a complete formulary, but it was not sufficient. We were informed that the government, since January 2014, was now requiring additional documentation to bring medications into the country. As the trip leaders continued to discuss the situation with the inspectors, the students all gathered to pray. In the middle of the airport, with people walking around us, we pleaded before God for victory. Jade Machin (P4 student) reflected, “I remember thinking, ‘Why would God allow something like this if we are here to help people?’ But we quickly prayed, and I was reminded that God was in control and everything would be okay.” Regardless of our efforts and pleas to our Lord for Him to intervene, the airport seized all of our bags with medications and supplies, including those that had initially passed the screening, to be held until we went through the proper channels.

As a pharmacist, our area of expertise is medications, so what were we supposed to do now that we found ourselves suddenly bereft of all our medications and supplies? As we gathered for team devotions after dinner, the mood of the team was not what you would expect. There was no complaining or discouragement; instead everyone was decidedly hopeful and expectant of God to do something amazing, as only God can do, in spite of the circumstances. We knew that our God is strong enough to heal whatever illness a patient might have without any medicine. With that in mind, we were determined to pray with every patient and try to minister to them spiritually. Stephanie Ellis (P2 student) put it best, “We are just going to pray away that strep throat in the name of Jesus.” Regardless of our potential inability to provide medical care, we were there to accomplish the team verse we







chose during the semester, 1 Chronicles 16:24 “Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!” (ESV)

The next day we gathered as a team to encourage each other and organize the supplies that were available at the camp. Praise the Lord that mission teams from our school and other locations in the United States left behind unused medications and supplies from previous trips. Because of their faithfulness we had something to offer to patients who we would see in the upcoming clinic days. It was also at that time we experienced our first taste of God’s faithfulness. One of our suitcases had somehow come back to camp with us instead of staying at the airport, and the first miracle in the midst of this perceived disaster was that it contained the albendazole and mebendazole that we give to almost every patient for parasitic infections, obtained from consuming contaminated water. God somehow blinded the eyes of the customs officials at the airport so that they missed it and never asked about this one bag that we desperately needed. There were songs of praise rising up all day for those two bottles of medications. Day after day, there were more instances of God’s provision. When they were contacted regarding the situation with the team’s supplies, the local doctors we were working with brought bags of medications for us to dispense. In

fact, one doctor even brought his own prescription pad to write prescriptions for patients to have filled at local pharmacies for medications we did not have. Nothing was going the way we had planned, but God was meeting every one of our needs and the patients’ needs in His own way.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9, ESV).

After the end of the second day of clinic, and going on our third day of no medications it seemed that we would not see our bags again, although we were all praying and believing that the Lord would provide for our needs. On the way

back to camp we were given the joyous news that God had abundantly blessed us with the return of all of our supplies, including the medications. We were then able to not only serve the people in the local community spiritually, but also medically for our last two clinic days and see God do tremendous things with the abundance of medications He had returned to us.

We, as a team, were able to see God working everything for good as He gave us the privilege of leading several patients to Christ. Every night when we gathered for devotions and to discuss the happenings of the day, we left encouraged as we heard stories of God healing people’s souls, in spite of the fact that we were not always able to meet their physical needs. The first day of clinic, Jade Machin (P4 student) was processing a patient at triage with multiple physical problems, including depression. We were able to do little for his physical needs, but she and Dr. Jackson were able to share the love of God with him and he accepted Jesus as his Savior. The next day he came back and he was radiating with the joy of the Lord. The man we had seen the day before was gone. Not due to any medicine we could give him, but because of the healing power of the Great Physician.

Stories like these were shared every night, including one of a 16 year old girl with a sexually transmitted infection accepting



Christ. This beautiful girl came into the clinic complaining of an ear ache. When Dean Ferrill and Hannah Morris (P4 student) examined the patient's ear, there was no sign of an infection. When we told her this, she went on to tell us about a wart on her genitalia. It seemed that the ear ache was used as an excuse to be seen at our clinic. We were able to treat her with acyclovir to control the symptoms and decrease any flare ups, but the ultimate treatment we provided her was the good news of Jesus Christ. Three of our team members spent 45 minutes in the room counseling this patient on God's love and how only he can heal us spiritually. The young girl accepted Christ as her Savior and made a commitment to herself and God to live a life of sexual purity.

Another inspiring story arose not from a doctor's office but rather from the waiting room. A teenage girl was sitting by herself with a blank stare on her face. Naivys Rodriguez, a P2 student, felt the need to talk to this young girl. When she approached the girl she noticed signs of self-mutilation on her arms. As Naivys started talking to her, she revealed that she had been having suicidal thoughts and actually had a plan to kill herself.

Naivys took it upon herself to start talking to this girl about God and His unfailing love for her. She explained that in the eyes of God, she was worth more than gold. She then brought another team member over and started praying fervently with this girl for peace and comfort. As the prayer finished this girl had a bright new smile on her face and it was clear that God was with her and comforting her. These are just a few of the stories that encouraged us each night after an exhausting day of work.

We thought we were prepared for whatever could happen, and we even discussed spiritual warfare prior to the trip, but we were not prepared for the way in which spiritual warfare presented itself. When you are attacked you have two options: admit defeat and be discouraged, or press forward believing that God is stronger than whatever the devil can throw at you. All glory to God; our team chose the latter. From the P2 students to the trip leaders, everyone was certain of one thing: our God is faithful. We were able to say with Paul, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down,

but not destroyed;" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9, ESV). During this trip Joseph's words, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." (Genesis 50:20, ESV) resonated within our hearts. As a team, we experienced the indescribable faithfulness and power of our God, and it is something we will never forget. Our primary purpose in Costa Rica was to provide physical and spiritual healing to the people, but what we were not expecting was how the people would impact our lives and change us. When we gave them a smile, they gave us a bigger one. When we gave hugs, they hugged us back just as strong. Even when we prayed for them, some prayed for us as well. It was a beautiful experience of God's people interacting with one another and sharing His love with each other, and no member of the 2014 Costa Rican Mission Team will ever forget it. †

*At the time this manuscript was presented, all authors were fourth year pharmacy students at the Lloyd L. Gregory School of Pharmacy Palm Beach Atlantic University. They all graduated in May 2015.*



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***Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send?  
And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"***

Isaiah 6:8