

March 2, 2016

What a great joy to be involved in the GATS Teacher Training Seminar Program! Last year, Missionary Joe Bir asked me to come with him to Peru and help teach the very first GATS Teacher Training Seminar in Lima, Peru. At that time, we had a good number of interested people show up for the seminar, and it was a tremendous success. The Peruvian people were open to teaching and eagerly received everything that we had to offer -- so much so that they squeezed all of the "teach" right out of us!

When I left last year, many asked if I would be returning this year for another seminar, to which question I could only reply, "the Lord knows!" As the Lord would have it, Bro. Joe Bir contacted me around Christmas and asked me if I would consider returning with him to Peru again this year for a follow up GATS Teacher Training Seminar, and with great joy I accepted the invitation to return to Peru for a second seminar.

It was decided that they wanted a total of nine GATS Educator's lessons taught, so as to take advantage of our time there. Knowing that teaching nine lessons in less than two full days might be a challenge for just two speakers, we invited Sis. Loretta Bir, a talented speaker and experienced educator, to teach some of the sessions. It was a "first" to have a missionary wife be one of the speakers for the GATS seminar in Peru, but the brethren were open and receptive to her teaching. Sis. Bir has such a gracious way about her, that as she taught, she projected a sincere desire to help, and came across in a way that made everyone present comfortable and receptive to the things she was teaching.

When we got to the church for the seminar, we discovered that all of the pastors of Peru were gathered there for an extraordinary general pastors assembly that had been in session for two days, and was just wrapping up when we arrived. In spite of having been there for two days already, many of the pastors stayed on and participated in the GATS Teacher Training Seminar. I believe we had somewhere around 45 people who had officially signed up for the seminar.

We kicked off the seminar with a session on "The Well Driven Nail". While everyone present didn't have their own hammers and nails, as I drove in point after point with a hammer loaned to me by my host pastor, and 4" spikes into a huge block of wood ... they joined me by making hammers of their fists and helped me drive home the essential points! It was a great way to kick off the seminar, and you could feel the excitement that was coming from everyone present.

The next morning, Sis. Loretta Bir taught two sessions, with a break in between. They were the Professor and Creative Impact, and then the Professor and Motivation. She did an excellent job. From there, we moved into the session on "Overcoming Temptation", and there was a tremendous move of the Lord's presence throughout that session. I believe the Lord put the right words in my heart to share, and the response was awesome!

Bro. Joe Bir followed this session with powerful teaching on a "Fresh Look at the Great Commission". He challenged Peru to reach the point that they would produce and send forth a regional missionary. You could feel his burden and passion, and it made a tremendous impression on all who were present.

That evening, Sis. Bir taught on Styles of Thinking, Learning and Teaching, followed by Bro. Bir teaching on Creating a Culture of Learning. They are a tremendous teaching team and really touched the hearts of the Peruvians with these lessons.

We moved into the final sessions the next morning and once again, Bro. Joe Bir stirred our hearts with his teaching on "Lesson Preparation". His unique way of presenting the material and his passion for being a Godly teacher came across very clearly, and made a powerful impact. The very last session was on mentoring, and for some reason, I had it in my head that it might garner only a weak response. I could not have been more wrong! As I taught on everyone's need for a mentor ... from the top leader down to the lowliest pastor, it struck a chord, and the response blew me away. They were literally hanging on every word. I was conscious of the time, and when I finished, tried to hand the microphone to the host pastor ... but they would not let me go -- peppering me with questions for another twenty minutes.

It is very fulfilling, and at the same time, very humbling to be in the presence of people who are hungry for teaching, and open to receive whatever the Lord has for them. I cannot thank Bro. Joe Bir and the leadership of the work in Peru for extending this opportunity to come to Peru and be of service. People came up to us afterward, hugging our necks -- some with tears in their eyes -- thanking us for allowing the Lord to use us to bring these teachings to them. I am so deeply thankful, Bro. Poitras for all the GATS materials that you and others have produced that are being such a blessing around the world wherever they are taught.

After the conclusion of the seminar, Bro. Bir and I had the opportunity to sit down with the Peruvian national education committee and talk about ways to integrate their current programs into the GATS program. In that meeting the Lord did a wonderful thing. The brethren asked me what we do in Nicaragua, and I had the privilege of sharing various administrative aspects of our program, which I pointed out was based on Guatemala, which we in Nicaragua consider to be the finest Bible School operation in Latin America! I gave them copies of what courses are taught in each semester, for each program level, number of hours, etc. I also gave them sample copies of our class schedules for day and Saturday programs. Finally, I shared with them the student application we use, and a sample copy of one of the grade transcripts that we send to GATS headquarters for diploma approval.

The real exciting part was seeing exactly when the "light came on" in their eyes, and they began to grasp what sort of changes they could make to come into compliance with the GATS program. I don't know when or how this will all come about, but my prayer is that the Lord will show them the way and give them the courage and the vision to work together toward a common goal.

In closing, may I say again how very much I have appreciated the opportunity to promote the GATS program and teacher training throughout the Spanish-speaking world. It has been one of the highlights during the last number of years of our missionary service. I appreciate the trust that has been showed by the various Regional Directors, Area Coordinators and Regional GATS representatives that have allowed me to enter their areas of responsibility to minister for the Lord.