

Chapter 1

The Call of God

That's my book, I thought, as I stared at the nearest of two identical Bibles on the table to my right. *I know it's my book. I told You, Lord, that I'll choose the book closest to me, if that's the one You want me to choose. Oh, what a beautiful peace I feel now! Thank You, thank You, Lord!*

That was my book. I knew that when the time came, I'd choose that book. There was no doubt in my mind. Whatever that book revealed would make a tremendous impact on my family and me. Would I continue filling my place as a minister, writer, and farmer in the peaceful countryside near Pital, Costa Rica? Or would I become a pioneer missionary in the war-ravaged interior of Nicaragua?

For several months my family and I had wrestled with this decision. At times we had felt overwhelmed with doubts, fears, and unanswered questions. Now, here we sat, in the Pital Amish/Mennonite church house, heads bowed, counting down to the moment that could change our lives forever. We were at peace, surrendered to God.

My precious wife, Eunice (Euni), sat beside me. She had struggled the hardest. If we were chosen to go to Nicaragua, she

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knew her life would never be the same. She would be a pioneer missionary's wife, with its heartaches and perils. Her veiled head was bowed in submission to her God and to her husband.

Seventeen-month-old Cynthia sat on Euni's lap. Beside her were five-year-old Luana, then Jessica and Janie, our nine-year-old twins. Last on the bench sat our eleven-year-old son, Jacinto (ha-SEEN-toh).

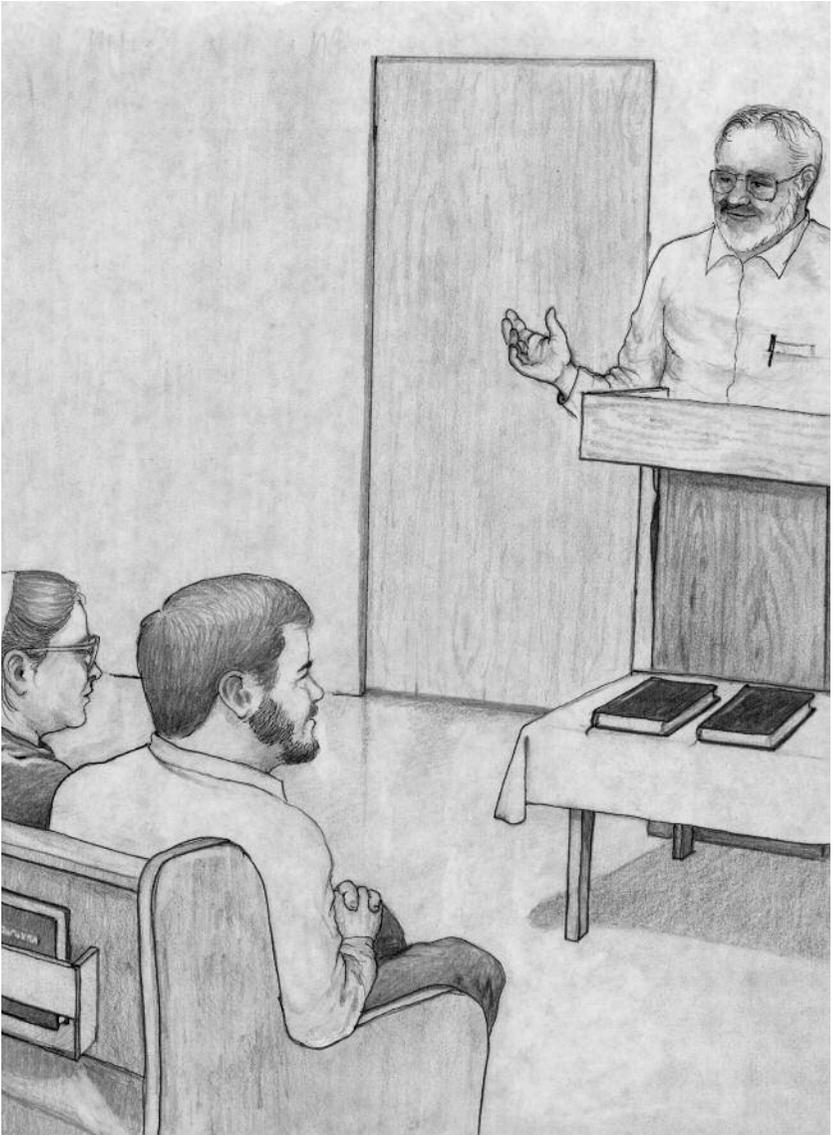
Even the children sensed the intensity of this service. In a few short minutes they would know if they must leave the cousins they loved so much. The Pital church house had never been this full; nor had Mama and Daddy ever looked so serious.

For several years our churches in Costa Rica had sensed a call to start a Biblical church in Nicaragua. We had made several trips to locate an area that was hungry for the Gospel. I personally went twice for evangelistic meetings. After these meetings and others, the churches decided the place to start was the Waslala/Kusulí (koo-soo-LEE) area of Nicaragua. The interest there seemed overwhelming. It also looked like a fertile area for farming where we might make a living.

After the churches decided where God wanted us to go, we needed to face who should go. After praying and fasting, the churches asked if anyone felt called and willing to go. We as a family turned in a letter recognizing a "something we felt." Two other ministers were also being considered for the work. After a time of prayer and conferring together, a committee of bishops interviewed each of us three ministers. Based on these interviews, the bishops felt we were the ones to go.

So we presented it to the Pital Church. This was a blow to them, since I was their only minister. Although the committee assured them that another pastor would be provided for the church, they were still negative. But all the Pital brethren honestly felt they wanted the Lord's will.

We were torn. On one side of the decision was the call we sensed, the circumstances that lined up, and the united voice of fourteen ministers in our churches. On the other side was our beloved church, who didn't think God was asking them to lose their



"Pablo, you may now take one of the books."

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only pastor. Finally we all agreed to have a “yes or no” lot and let God do the choosing.

Now the moment of the lot had come. The Pital church house was full and overflowing onto the front porch, sidewalks, and then some. We sat on one side of the auditorium, on the front bench, facing the pulpit. Sitting directly behind us was the precious Pital congregation I had ministered for nine years. The remainder of the church house was filled with family and friends who had come to offer moral support.

A little table stood to my right, between me and the pulpit. Two identical Bibles had been placed on the table.

The congregation sang three songs. My father, Sanford Yoder, had just given a short devotional. Solemnly now, Dad turned to one of the ministers and handed him a slip of paper. “Please take these two Bibles outside and place this paper inside one of them. Leave the Bibles there and come back in.”

The minister returned and sat down. Dad asked a second minister to go outside, shuffle the books, lay them down, and then come back in.

Then Dad asked a third brother, “Please go outside and bring in the books.”

The third brother went out, brought the books inside, and placed them reverently on the table. No one on earth knew which book had the lot in it.

But God knew.

And I knew which book God wanted me to choose—the one closest to me. I was at peace.

Everyone knelt while Dad led the prayer, “God, we commit this matter into Your hands; please show us Your will . . .”

Dad rose to his feet and gently said, “Pablo, you may now take one of the books.”

Without hesitation, I leaned forward and took my book, the book that held my family’s destiny. *God, I don’t know what’s in that book, but You do. Whatever it is, I want.*

A great hush blanketed the assembly. Dad stepped forward and took the book from my hands. My children stared wide-eyed as he

gently turned to the pages that separated the Old and New Testaments. My wife and I bowed our heads.

Tense silence . . .

I prayed . . .

The book I had chosen contained the slip of paper. His voice choked with emotion as he held up the slip and read: “The lot is cast into the lap, but its decision is from the Lord” (Proverbs 16:33, paraphrased from Spanish).

God was calling us to go!

A wave of emotion rolled over the entire church house. As we heard our brothers and sisters weeping, the dam broke for Euni and me. Several months of pent-up emotions erupted as we buried our heads in our hands and wept.

That was Sunday, March 26, 1995. God was near and I’m sure no one who witnessed the service doubted whether He was at work. It was hard for the church to accept our leaving, but they were willing, and we all accepted that the lot confirmed His will.

Though we knew that God was calling us to Nicaragua, we still had many fears to face. We already had a taste of that on one of our earlier trips, when we were first looking for an area to take the Gospel.