

The Forge Faith Trip to Spain and Portugal 15th December 2016 - 5th January 2017

Overall Vision and Aims:

Following the Brexit referendum (June 2016) we have increasingly felt a burden and responsibility to pray for the countries of Europe, as well as the UK. To summarise our insights so far:

- ⤴ God wants Britain to come out from under the spiritual authority of the EU.
- ⤴ Britain is very much part of Europe and has a crucial role to play in Europe.
- ⤴ Britain has a special responsibility to pray into Europe in these days.
- ⤴ What God wants for Britain can only be achieved as an independent country.

I felt as we planned this first Forge trip to mainland Europe that we were a tiny prophetic sign, like an arrow, pointing to what God wants to do, pouring prayer from the UK into all European countries and right across to Israel, in what look increasingly like the last days. Our aims were:

- ⤴ to pray and see what insights God gave us in each place;
- ⤴ to give opportunity for all team members to experience faith in action;
- ⤴ to encourage and bless the places we went to and the people we met.

God showed me a picture as we prepared, of a big sack of seeds. As we went we were sowing handfuls of faith seeds everywhere.

Part 1 – Montefrio (Granada)

On the way here we made a slight detour to visit the small town of Aguilar de la Frontera, where my Grandparents lived as missionaries from the mid 80s to the mid 90s. They were a great inspiration to me.

A warm welcome in a cold place! Ian and Irene's warm hearts and enthusiasm helped us to catch the vision for an outpouring of God in this little mountain town. We climbed mountains stood on ancient watch towers, danced on roman threshing floors, cut down trees, fished a turtle out of the local river and experienced the glory of God in the catholic church. We began to gel and work as a team.

This town, like Aguilar, formed part of the last frontier of the Islamic kingdom of Al Andalus which ruled the south of Spain from the 8th to the 15th Centuries. At the local castle museum we could see some of the Islamic heritage in Spain. This area is still a spiritual battleground in our day.

Granada

1 day at the Alhambra, admiring the majestic, snow-covered mountains, exploring the ancient Moorish palace full of water and light. Then, wandering through the town we saw a girl full of demons, hanging off a high wall over the river, laughing. As we helped to pull her to safety she screamed and fought. Disturbed, unable to do more, we left her with the police.

Part 2 – San Roque and Gibraltar

San Roque

To me a very familiar place. I love it's narrow streets, it's familiar faces. I worked here at the World Horizons base with the local Spanish church for 6 years. My time here was not always easy, particularly in the relationships with the people here. This time they were so gracious to us and we were able to spend time with them, pray with them, encourage them and bless them, just as they blessed us. It was lovely. The others in the team went out exploring and found the gypsy church. We were welcomed and attended a worship service there and were invited to bless them from the platform. It was very special for the Asians to experience gypsy culture and bless them in Korean.

I felt God wants to blow fresh winds through this place, to blow away the clogged up places of the past and release new vision.

Gibraltar

Gibraltar feels very different from Spain, freer and clearer. We could sense how God has held this place separate, as a crucial gateway between Spain and North Africa; a gatekeeper into and out of the Mediterranean. We saw a mosque, many churches, Jewish Orthodox costumes in the High street and God began to speak to Jihee about the importance of Spain and Israel. He is calling the believers there to rise up, warriors of faith! Rise to the battle!

Part 3 – Seville

Before we went, God showed Jihee a picture of a rainbow for Seville.

We arrived for this unplanned part of the journey in good spirits, in bright sunshine. For hours we traipsed around the city with all our bags, unable to get a clear lead on anything. It got darker and, our spirits became heavier. We started praying by the river near an ancient fig tree. Owen felt that Seville was a place where much good has been done in the name of the Lord, but he could see it all floating away down the river, leaving the city. There wasn't even anything to pray, except that some good would stay here, not all be gone. Jihee saw a Spanish word "Vende" (which means for sale) and began pursuing houses with for sale signs (there were many) to see if one of those was available for us to stay in. I even had to phone one family and ask them. The trail eventually led to a block of holiday apartments which had 1 vacancy. It was not cheap, but JiHee felt by faith to contribute some money and we stayed there. This experience broke some of our self reliance .

The next day we walked and walked again, but never felt we had arrived anywhere. We had to decide whether to buy tickets to travel to Lisbon that night, knowing that in our budget there was not enough money to get back to Spain again. We took the step of faith.

Finally, back at the river again, by the old fig tree, Jihee saw her rainbow – the oil from one of the cruise ships was spreading out all over the water, shining rainbow colours in the sunset. She felt that the ships of Tarshish (ancient Spain) have a destiny to be used to transport God's people of Israel in the last days.

Part 4 – Lisbon

While at Forge school, Mathew Toller gave us a word about the trip to Portugal. He felt Portugal would be very significant, that God had a gift for us there; that it was important in what spirit we went, that would determine who we met and what happened. We were reminded of that word as we prayed in Seville and so we could not give up but had to go on.

Early morning arrival, cold and tired, we found a cafe called "Shalom." It was God's word to us. We shared our meditation there and had coffee, and blessed the cafe owner. We used his internet and Yechan found us an apartment to stay in. As we walked around to find the bus stop, we realised the place was called 7 rivers – it reminded us of Beersheba, 7 wells or well of promise.

There in Lisbon God, released finances for us: different people began to put money into various of our bank accounts. I had prayed that God would increase the faith of all the team members, not just me, and I received no money at all, it all came through the team. We had more than enough and were able to celebrate New Year with a tray of traditional sugary cakes and hot chocolate in the park.

God's word was also released to us. Owen's mum had heard "Vasco de Gama" and we researched him. A medieval explorer who opened up the sea trading routes around South Africa and across to India, he helped to make the great Portuguese empire of the past. He is revered and honoured everywhere. As we followed his trail and prayed around the ancient monastery where he is buried, we came across a square facing out to sea, right in front of the president's official residence. A statue of Vasco de Gama stood in the centre, with scenes depicting his great battle victories and humiliation of his (Muslim) enemies around the 4 sides. At the 4 corners of the square were statues of 4 women: 1 with a sea creature; 1 with a goat and bunch of grapes; 1 with a fawn shot with an arrow and a bow in her hand, and one with a young boy child. Owen felt clearly this square represented what we were meant to pray about: Vasco de Gama is revered and honoured, although he was without compassion and was motivated by power and money; the 4 women represented dominion over sea, field, forest and people. This was a false idol, something that looked great but wasn't; just as Vasco de Gama was a great navigator but could not bless other nations as God wanted. Owen saw in the spirit an angelic figure standing in the square but it was made of stone, it was not an angel at all it just looked like one. We felt Portugal needs a different figure to look to for its inspiration in these days, not the one who made a way across the seas to fame and fortune, but the one who made a way from earth to the Kingdom of Heaven. We felt it is important that the new Secretary General of the UN this year, Antonio Guterres, is a former Prime Minister of Portugal. Portugal has an important role in Europe at this time, and it needs to not look to Vasco de Gama and what he represents but find new inspiration and direction for today.

This ties in with something God showed me as I prayed on a hilltop in a park not far from where we stayed. I felt God was calling prayer warriors in Portugal to rise up and unite. Portugal forms the western border of Europe, and I saw these intercessors praying in a line across Portugal, looking East across Europe all the way to Israel. Maybe they will not be many, but they must be united and pray.

Sao Pedro do Estoril

While still in San Roque, and aware of our limited budget, Sang Kyun our treasurer had done some looking ahead. In faith he contacted an air B&B place and said that we were Christians on a faith journey and couldn't afford their prices, so could we pay half. To our amazement the guy wrote back and said he was a Christian too and would like to meet us, so yes! (If we helped with cleaning.) We went to stay with him on 1st January. It seemed God had an appointment for us.

The place was a long way out of town. The previous guests had trashed the place and left. There were several longer-term residents there, all troubled, damaged souls with nowhere else to go. I was NOT impressed and wanted to leave, but others were still sure this was the place God had led us to; we had come to be a blessing, so stay and bless we must. The team all mucked in and cleaned up while I fought my way through the smog in the kitchen to cook dinner. We chatted and shared with the other residents as they chain-smoked in the kitchen. We spent time worshipping and praying at the house, we prayed for Jeremy and his family and for the men that lived there, we blessed them every way we could think of. They really seemed to need it. When we left the next afternoon, the place did not only look better, it felt different too. Maybe we will never know what difference we made, but we were all glad we stayed there.

We also met up with Jeremy's pastor, a Portuguese South African man who has been pastoring and international church just outside Lisbon for 20 years. He had some fascinating insights on Portugal and the spiritual climate there.

Part 5 – Olivenza

The final 2 days of the trip we went just over the border back to Spain. Olivenza is a small, border town with history in Portugal and in Spain. My friends Phil and Jo Berry and their children have lived there for around 17 years. They currently run a successful English language school in their home and work with a local Baptist church. We wanted to encourage and bless them as they invest their lives quietly planting small seeds in lots and lots of people. They blessed us with warm hospitality and Christmas cake! Phil volunteered to drive the team back to Gibraltar on 5th January to get our flight in the evening, which was brilliant because I had forgotten it was a big public holiday on 6th and we may have had a problem getting bus tickets!

The Return Journey

We didn't quite all fit in the van so 2 of us went by Blabla Car. Both journeys were amazing! From Badajoz to Seville we shared a car with 2 young men, 1 from Majorca who told me his Grandfather was a believer and he used to go to church with him but gave up when he started playing football (!) The other was a devout follower of the Virgen Rocio and had never met an evangelical christian. I kept praying in between conversations, and they kept on asking me questions about my faith all the way to Seville.

The second journey was even more amazing! This guy spoke English so Owen could share the talk. During the course of the journey as we shared what we believed, the driver Manuel remembered that he had known a family of British evangelical missionaries in his home town of Lucena. They had taught him English for a couple of years. In fact they were good friends of my Grandparents!! I had met them twice when I visited my Grandparents in Spain. Clearly Manuel had not thought about this for years, but I could tell seeds had been sown there and now God was using us to stir them up. We were able to pray for Manuel before he dropped us off. Who knows where God will lead him.

And so the journey ended and we flew home. I felt as if my big sack of seeds was at least half empty. We will keep on praying for the purposes of God in both Spain and Portugal, and I look forward to seeing many others travel there to bless and witness for God from the UK.