

June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010

Greetings,

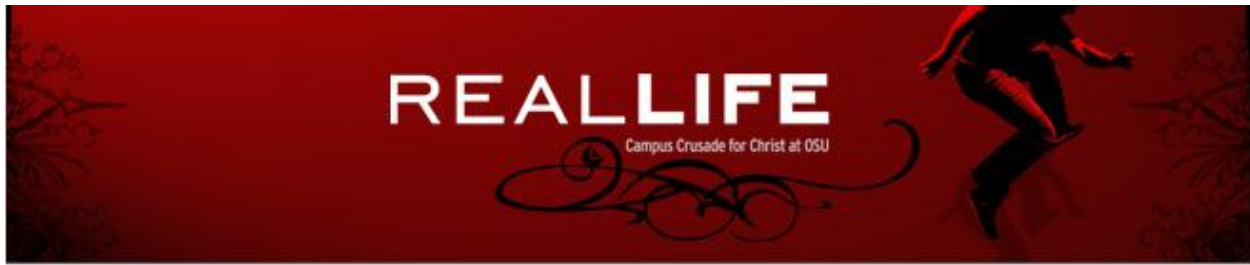
It is Sunday evening here in Valencia as I'm typing this update and I hope that whenever it is that you read this update, it finds you recognizing God's blessings and grace in your life.

If you have never been outside the country, something that I have learned is that flexibility is essential. While we can recognize that other cultures are very different in comparison with ours, we cannot anticipate every difference. We really learned that this past week. For example, even workers' strikes are different. The professors announced a few weeks ago that they were going to strike on Tuesday and Wednesday (whereas strikes in the states are not usually announced unless preceded by a threat and there usually is not a defined end). I don't completely understand how they plan to get better salaries this way, but that is their plan. Thursday was a holiday (Día del Carabobo) commemorating a South American military victory over Spain that sealed their independence. Thus, classes were cancelled from Tuesday through Thursday. With no classes, we could not go to campus because every student is a commuter and no one would be there. We then expected to be on campus Friday, but often when there is a Thursday holiday, students extend it to Friday as well (even if classes are not cancelled). At this point, I think it is important to note that a college education at a public university in Venezuela is 100% subsidized, so the student pays nothing.

At a loss for plans we were able to come up with ways to do ministry in the midst of the problems with our original plans. On Tuesday we met with our different ministry teams. At our Outreach meeting we were able to put together many of the details for our outreach this Friday. It is really taking shape and I cannot wait to see what God is going to do with it. Wednesday, with a little more time to plan (we did not know that we couldn't go to campus until 20 minutes before we expected to leave), we got the Vida Estudiantil students together and went to a park called Negra Hipólita (Valencia's Central Park) to hang out and have fellowship together. This was a great opportunity for us to get to know the students to develop relationships and really get involved in the students' lives outside of campus. We also had several students from the university that we had shared with on Monday join us on Wednesday, which gave us the opportunity to do some relational evangelism.

Thursday we returned to the park and took the opportunity to walk around the park (there were many people there celebrating the national holiday) to try to start spiritual conversations with the Venezuelans at the park. I got to have a conversation with a couple early on and we were able to get into the Gospel, which is always cool to see (often Venezuelans are content to

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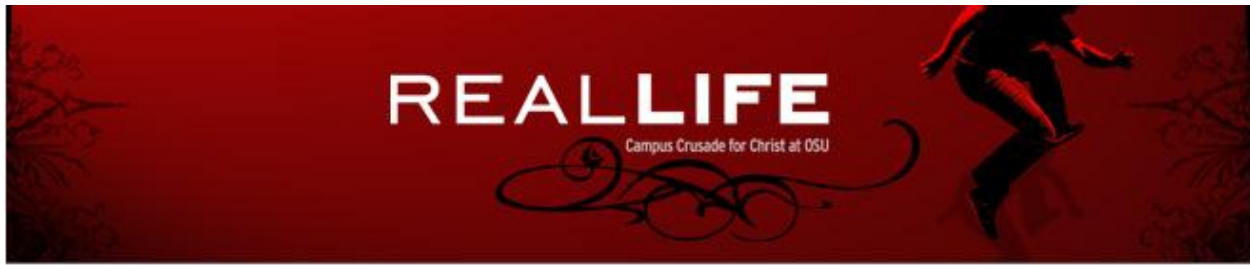
just talk about the United States or practice English). We did not have any translators with us either, so it was cool to see how God used the broken Spanish of the people in my group to communicate His grace. After that, we began speaking to a group of teenagers sitting on a bench. They all seemed very excited to be talking to us and they were ready for us to start talking about the Gospel, but at about that moment, a park official came up to us to tell us that we were not allowed to talk about religion in the park because it is public, government property. We were pretty disappointed to be stopped in this way (we had not been able to share like this in group effort since Monday), but it caused me to step back and realize the blessings that we have in the United States that even if people don't want to hear us, it is their decision and to realize the tragedy of physically seeing an obstacle to people experiencing God's grace, which makes me even more excited for the opportunities that we should have starting tomorrow to share the Gospel at the university.

Friday, we did something a little out of the ordinary for summer projects. On Friday we had the opportunity to visit a nearby orphanage. This was a side of Venezuela that none of us were really prepared for. We had seen a very middle and upper class side of Venezuela in the college atmosphere, but this was the exact opposite and I am struggling to put words to the experience. We had no plans except to spend time with the kids but it still went really well. The kids very much latched onto us and there are certainly too many stories for this update to do justice to the experience. Yesterday we took the Vida Estudiantil students to the beach, which was a good time for fun and fellowship (and slight sunburn). To round out the weekend, today was our Sabbath rest day. We went to another church called La Viña (which was air-conditioned!). This church is one of two partnering churches for Vida Estudiantil, providing support as much as possible to the movement and claiming it as a part of their outreach to their city. The pastor, a former Campus Crusade staff person, gave us the opportunity to explain to the congregation about what we were doing in Venezuela and, after the service, told us his story of receiving Christ through Campus Crusade in the United States and then travelling around Europe with Campus Crusade's founder, Bill Bright; he is truly an awesome man and a great minister in Venezuela.

Some things that we would appreciate prayers for include:

- Continued opportunities to be bold in sharing the Gospel with students and non-students alike in Venezuela (we met a person on a bus who also lives in one of our apartment buildings and he came to church with us this morning)
- Health: while we are healthier as a team, there are still a few who are feeling the intestinal effects of transitioning to a new culture

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- Boundaries to be torn down that keep people from the Gospel: Cultural, linguistic, political and spiritual
- Endurance: we are all excited to get back into a regular weekly schedule, but still have not reached the midway point. We have a long way to go and we will really need to live in the Spirit to be able to do ministry fully to the very end.
- The Outreach on Friday: we still have some details to finish up and it is always a difficult task for Americans to try to develop things that will appeal to Venezuelans.

As always, I would love to hear about what is going on in all of your lives back at home and I would be more than willing to pray for you all. Until next Sunday, I pray that God blesses you with His grace and love in ways that can bring you only to praise.

-Ross Antonacci