

# SCALPEL'S EDGE

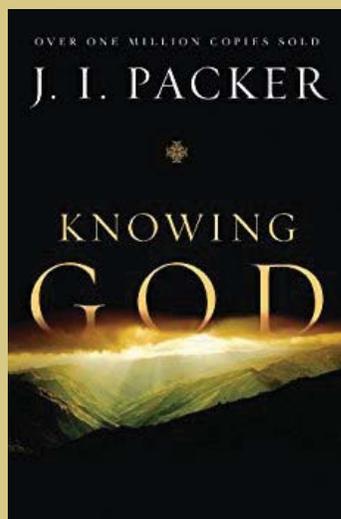
*Scalpel*  
AT THE CROSS  
A Christian Medical Mission  
to the Peruvian Amazon

A GIFT OF LIGHT, HOPE AND SURGERY TO PERU

THIRD QUARTER 2017 | ISSUE 22

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—Peter A. Cole, MD

## WHEN HELPING HURTS

Scalpel Leaders Undertake New Book Journey

by Peter A. Cole, MD — President, Scalpel At The Cross



Two years ago, Scalpel At The Cross Leadership Team set out on a journey to explore truth through a book review of the Christian classic, *Knowing God*, by JI Packer, led by Bob Korljan, Pastor and Board Member. At the time I had written a lead article in this journal (Issue 16), *Knowing Ourselves and Knowing God--Securing the Cornerstone*, in which I expressed, “I had an acute sense that I needed, with a humble spirit and God's guidance, to strengthen the core of our leadership to match and prepare for a newfound responsibility.” I wrote, “...when it knows itself well, strategies are developed which are consistent with its values and which amplify its purpose. With a clear understanding of itself, an organization will recruit new leaders and members with energy to catapult the vision

through clarity of stewardship, efficiency in decision making, and synergies of talent...I am confident that we are doing something important, something disruptive, in strengthening the core of the ministry and influencing its leaders in a way which builds organizational integrity, which equips us to scale this steep new mission slope, which will serve and account to you better and glorify God foremost.”

I am convinced we fulfilled the purpose. Over the past two years, we tackled the topics of each chapter with rigor, meeting by conference call early Saturdays, while we probed and provoked, explored and exhorted each other. We plunged into the origins of man and the attributes of God: love, grace, wrath,

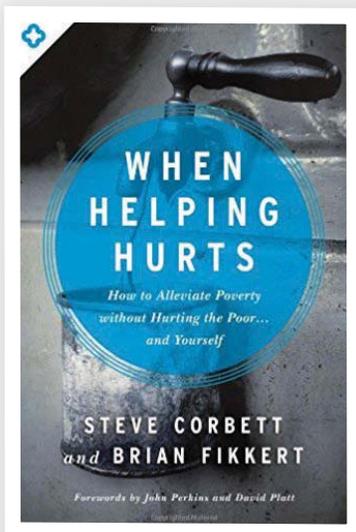
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# WHEN HELPING HURTS

jealousy, goodness...We started our journey with a new understanding of wisdom which comes from fearing the Lord, and ended the 22nd chapter with the adequacy of God, "the fullest cross-section of the life of sin and the life of grace, and the deepest analysis of the way of faith..." such that we were, "convinced that neither death nor life...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord." (Romans 8: 38-39) Our Board has changed its complexion very significantly while programs and personnel have grown along the way.

I became convinced of the truth in an opening premise of our book, "Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul." (JI Packer)

With newfound resolve, the leadership team discussed new book discussion ideas to continue sharpening the irons of this growing ministry. We landed on, *When Helping Hurts, How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor...and Yourself*,



by Corbett & Fikkert (Copyright 2009, 2012). Board Member, Danielle Ellerbe, brought this book to our attention, and agreed to lead the team into a new mountain range of introspection. She described how this book was a great influence in her own personal and church ministry to urban-black, Boston neighborhoods with which she was unaccustomed growing up as a middle-class, white, privileged, suburbanite. Particularly, in a new American racial-era which rages in a cauldron of ignorance and revenge, this read informed her greatly. Dani described how the same theme, "When Helping Hurts", is no less relevant to our work in Peru.

As you likely know, our basic mission model is to assemble medical teams from North America for 10-day trips to the Peruvian Amazon, where we assess patients and treat them for orthopaedic conditions, including but not limited to broken bones and bone deformities. These types of trips have become popular for Americans. A multitude of NGO's are deploying well-meaning US citizens throughout the world on trips which have fallen at times under the dubious description of "medical tourism." It is certainly easy to cloak our good intentions under banners such as, "serving the poor," "helping the underprivileged," "providing relief," indeed, "medical mission trips," while we gawk at impoverished conditions and marvel at our cures and medical conquests. I, and other trip leaders for Scalpel At The Cross, spend significant

time up front on trips discussing with new team members, "When Helping Hurts." Our leadership is very in tune to this danger, and that is why we have chosen this new book for discussion.

We hardly realize it, but Americans are accustomed to accomplishment: hitting metrics, raising the bar, achieving new heights. We value efficiency and place a premium on the result as defined by goals. It has come to the point that from the time we can speak, formal education begins. Our parents thought preschool pushed our kids into unhealthy beginnings past kindergarten ABC's; yet, now academic daycare programs bypass preschool, as the working parent seeks to insure that their child gets a jump in the race to college.





This is a reality throughout the developing world. But Americans are even more ardent, given that highly organized, refereed sports leagues formulate our family schedules as soon as a child can ambulate! Whether we realize it or not, this influence infiltrates the modern day mission—and it's lousy. How many times have you heard the summary of such a trip, "We did X number of surgeries and did Y number of patient evaluations?" Woohoo!

Now add in other American culture traits: materialism, self-centeredness, self-indulgence, autonomy and independence...the list goes on; and all of these hit a brick cultural wall in Latin America. Especially in low-income settings, where none of these qualities color their culture, our approach can hurt. Without knowing it, our effect can undermine those whom we aim to serve. It is easy to discourage, devalue, displace and discredit, all while meeting our goals...if our goals are the wrong goals, or our methods are poorly conceived. It is easy to promote dependence and entitlement in the very culture we wish to set free.

What I have learned from living in South America as a child for several years, from traveling the world for education for twenty years, from visiting remote Peru for twenty-five years, and from praying for ministry effectiveness, is that one, single, new, loving, relationship is more powerful than 10 surgeries (later in this issue, you may read about just such a relationship with one of our patients, German). I have learned that teaching a new surgery to a Peruvian doctor will out-influence 50 patient evaluations. And I have



“ *Three issues that should be considered in the design and implementation of any poverty-alleviation strategy* ”

learned that playing a part in saving a soul for life is more powerful than 100 limb reconstructions. This reality provides context to our Scalpel At The Cross vision, to share the love of Christ through a medical mission in the Peruvian Amazon, and we take this very seriously.

Authors Steve Corbett, Assistant Professor, and Brian Fikkert, Professor, at Covenant Seminary (where our own Bob Korljan received his seminary degree), acknowledge that with the explosion of short and long-term mission groups, and our God-given mandate to serve the poor, they were compelled to write the book for the purpose of enhancing poverty-alleviation globally. The book begins with a discussion of the fundamental nature of poverty and deriving implications. They move into “three issues that should be considered in the design and implementation of any poverty-alleviation strategy,” and then cover applications for economic development in

different mission contexts. David Platt, President of the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board, makes the claim, “I have never read a better book on practically serving the poor; and I pray that God will use this new edition to equip His people to accomplish His purposes in a world of urgent spiritual and physical need for the glory of His great name.” This is a giant claim from a giant, which excites me greatly to plow into its pages with our Scalpel leadership and friends.

In conclusion, I would ask that you pray for our ministry, pray specifically for this book journey, and pray for a sustaining ability to carry out a more effective Orthopaedic Christian Mission. My hope is that our leaders at Scalpel At The Cross will continue to grow in their faith, and collectively radiate God's glory to the Peruvian Amazon, and to the mission team members who choose to serve. †

# PERU

## A HOME

By Lyndi Porch

Coffee. Why does this word make so many people smile? For some, the aroma is the main reason. For others, it is the flavor that peaks the taste buds. For me, coffee is a symbol of continuity and laughter. My family is known around different parts of the globe as being coffee lovers (maybe even coffee snobs by some). When friends come calling or new acquaintances are being introduced, the coffee pot starts to percolate and freshly brewed goodness is poured into mugs. This coffee tradition has been my experience on the three continents in which I have grown up, and it will continue to be a part of my lifestyle as I move into the unknown.

Peru is the most recent country in which I have lived life. Even as we moved to the place I would call “home” for the next two years, we were becoming known as coffee lovers. It was around this tradition that we were meeting the people who would become our neighbors and friends. This transition was interesting for me personally as we began new routines. A strange feeling came when we said goodbye to the friends with whom we had travelled to Peru. As they walked into the gate area of our small airport, we drove off alone to our new home in the jungle. It really hit me as I waved one final goodbye. Wow, I thought, now it’s just us here, and my residence is now Pucallpa, Peru. I remember feeling very uncertain



on our bumpy way back to Jungle Bunks, the guest-housing unit. But as with most transitions, Peru began to feel normal, and living in the heart of the Amazon no longer sounded crazy.

The “becoming more normal” feeling was incredibly hastened along by the Latino culture. The warmth of the people in Peru makes one feel very included and loved. Right from the get-go, a group of Spanish girls asked me, with my little to no understanding of the Spanish language, to become the tecladista, keyboarder, in their band. Extrovert as I am, I accepted on the spot. Looking back now, if I had declined, I would have missed out on so many opportunities. It began with talking back and forth through Google Translate and laughing at my crude attempts at Spanish and their so-so attempts at English. Music became the common language between our worlds in the beginning as they helped me grow my Castellano vocabulary. The girls drew me into their circles of friends and also brought me into their church’s worship team. In truth, without the warmth and friendships of these few people, my experience living in Pucallpa would have been much less fulfilling.





Along with meeting and getting to know Peruvians, I was thankful to have two other classmates who would share my junior and senior years of high school. This was a big jump from a public school with several hundred per grade. Though it was smaller, I was able to form tight relationships with these two in particular and the other eight people in the high school. The school was, and continues to be, a huge blessing for many of the missionary families in the Ucayali region. I was able to learn some very valuable lessons through this institution, and many of the teachers will be remembered as friends rather than instructors.

With Spanish as a class in school, and the language being spoken all around me, I was given the optimum opportunity to jump in and learn. With no Spanish and all French in my background, I was only able to communicate with “hola,” “no,” and “sí,” which was most often “oui” to begin. As time progressed, I started to be able to communicate and hone in on Spanish. I love languages, and I believe that this

is one of the greatest things I was able to take away from my experiences in Peru. Spanish.

With Spanish becoming increasingly easier, I was able to help out more with the medical teams. Scalpel At The Cross provided a huge opportunity for me to learn and grow. I always looked forward to teams coming at different points in the year. Each one carried its own dynamics and added new friends to fill my life with color. I was given an opportunity that most teenagers would never dream of getting. I was allowed to help with taking photos in the operating rooms, watch complicated surgeries unfold, and often retrieve supplies for the surgeons. The thing I have come to love most about Scalpel, in the many teams in which I have participated, is the change these surgeries make in people’s lives. Because I was able to remain after the teams had left and see the patients post-surgery, I was able to see the immense impact these operations had on these individuals. Big smiles and happy faces often accompany the patients that have had work

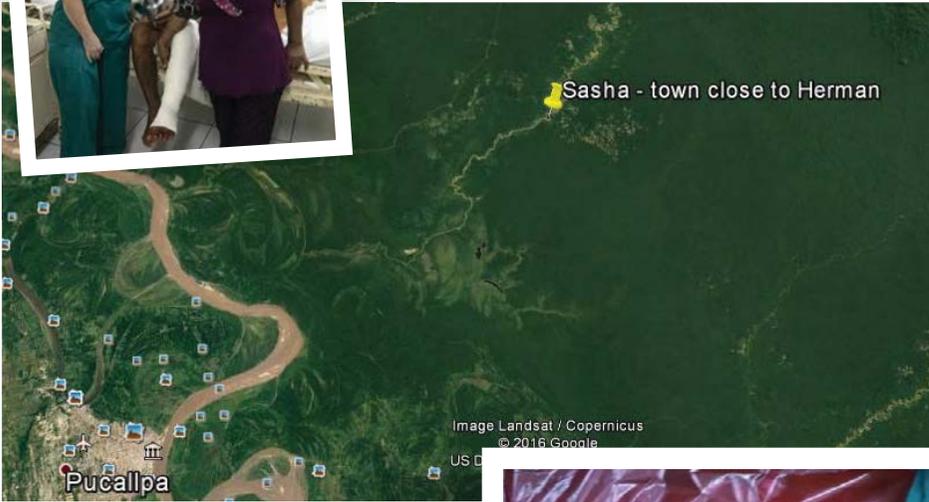
done on them by Scalpel teams. These are priceless expressions. These memories are forever captured in my mind.

Overall, the experience of living in Pucallpa, Peru over the past two years, has exceeded my expectations. I have been granted so many opportunities that I would not have been given if I had remained in Minnesota. Yes, there have been different disappointments along the way, but this is normal in everyone’s life, wherever one may choose to live. New friends with whom to sip coffee, new involvements, new lessons learned, and more world experience have given life an even more colorful vibe and have increased my enthusiasm in life’s adventure. I am so thankful to call Peru another “home” country. †



# GERMAN FINDS GRACE

by Tami Taylor PA-C



Imagine the anxiety and hopes of German and his wife, Anna, as they traveled to Pucallpa for two days on the Amazon tributary in a small, rented boat. With his yearly crop of rice to sell in order to pay for his trip, German was looking for a chance at grace that would change his life.

Eight years prior, he fell from a tree on his farm and broke his leg. He saw a doctor in hopes of healing. But after receiving treatment, German found out how difficult it was to heal a tibia; as soon as the pins were removed, his bone collapsed. He had five children and a wife to care for back at home, and he was experiencing significant daily pain.

German heard on the radio that a Scalpel At The Cross team of orthopaedic surgeons was coming to Pucallpa and decided to seek more help and healing. Now he and his wife were traveling in a rented boat with a small motor to help them navigate the large amounts of debris in the river. Out on the river, in the Amazon's oppressive heat, they had nothing to occupy their minds except the next branch, other boats, and of course, the worries of life.

I remembered German from among over 80 patients on evaluation day. His wife told us how she watched him suffer and cry with every step as the un-mended bone would shift and cause him pain, and she would sing to him to comfort him. She found the Lord during this trying time and had been reading some Bible tracks given to German by a missionary. But German had been resistant. I understood his grief, knowing he probably questioned how a loving God could allow so much suffering.

We were a small team with limited resources, and most bone nonunion surgeries take 3-5 hours to complete. We had three days for surgery after which our follow-up team would monitor healing and recovery. So much of this entire process was in God's hands! Even in the states, where we have ample food and antibiotics, it is challenging for these severe injuries to heal. I find the resilience of the Peruvian people so amazing.

German and his wife received the news that he was chosen for surgery, and he would be only one of 15 cases we completed in that week.

During surgery days, my heart went out to the patients waiting alone in the pre-surgical area. I wondered what they were thinking about, in a place so different from the more remote jungle areas they were accustomed to. I promised myself I would work on my Spanish skills for the next trip in order to comfort and converse with them. For now, I offered a smile and the touch of a hand.

German's surgery went very well thanks to the skilled surgeons and availability of hardware needed to hold his bone together, along with a bone graft to hopefully start new bone cell growth. My job as a physician assistant was to assist in surgery and help with suturing and splinting.

During post-operative checkup, I felt the urging of the Holy Spirit to hear German's full story and went to spend some time with him. Rick, a physical therapist from the states, and Isaac, a local physical therapist working with the mission, went with me, along with Heather, a local missionary and volunteer interpreter.

As we removed the bloody bandages and reapplied new ones, we asked German to share his story. His wife was there along with four other patients and their families in one large recovery room. There were no televisions, radios, or other distractions, so we had everyone's full attention. He began to tell us how he had been injured and how he and his family had suffered over the last eight years. We asked him if he knew that we were Christians. He nodded. We shared with him that because Christ showed us the ultimate grace – a gift not earned, we also wanted to share grace and volun-

# PRAYER POSSE

*This life, therefore, is not righteousness but growth in righteousness, not health but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be but we are growing toward it. The process is not yet finished but it is going on. This is not the end but it is the road.*

*All does not yet gleam in glory but all is being purified.*

*-Martin Luther*

What a rich and edifying way of looking at people from a Biblical perspective! These words reveal a real and transparent assessment of our condition as broken vessels; yet brim with hope and anticipation as we consider one another through the lens of Scriptural truth. While we often find ourselves weeping in the dark night of our fallen world and nature, this temporary mourning is recast into ever-increasing joy as we envision our ultimate eternity on streets that are golden.

This backdrop seems a befitting place to share our cheerfully dependent prayer requests with you, as Scalpel progresses as a dynamic work into Christ's likeness under His Lordship. The Lord does not reproach us in needing His help; so if you would be so kind, boldly approach His throne about the following matters:



\*Dan, Laurie, & Lyndi Porch's transition back to the States after spending 2 years serving as the infrastructure and "face" of Scalpel in Pucallpa, Peru.

Clarity of vision as we learn how to move forward in their absence without year-round "feet on Peruvian soil."

\*Welcoming into our fold Michael & Tiffany Simmons who will be assisting the mission beginning this fall with oversight of the Cashibo facilities. We feel blessed to have them coming alongside us as they've both grown up at Cashibo and desire to stay on there; however, this represents a new model of supervision for the mission as we flex with ever-present turnover.



\*Facility with August and November mission trips as Danielle Ellerbe trains as a trip leader to accommodate the continued growth of the mission, which regularly sends medical teams 3-4 times annually.



\*Transitioning of our CrossCare Electronic Medical Record System to the next level. Specifically, that the beta testing of the new version being utilized during our August trip will go smoothly, and once tested, we will be able to successfully transfer our CrossCare data from these past few years over to this newest rendition.



\*Praises for the rejuvenation experienced during our July Scalpel Board meeting in Bemidji, MN, where we were able to convene for purposes of laying out 2017-2018 vision plans. Pray fervently for our commitment, as a board, to the implementation of programming related to mission funding and development issues. †



teer our skills and resources through the mission. His wife told us how she had prayed German would receive Christ, and Isaac shared with German about Christ's ultimate sacrifice to give us the grace of eternal life - if we just believed. He asked if he would...and German said yes!

As German prayed to accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior, we were gathered around him and his wife who was crying so hard.

Actually, we were all crying. How great is our God!

What an awesome way to see the team's efforts result in a life saved, not just in the restoration of German's daily life here on earth, but in the establishment of eternal life that we will share with him! Imagine the lives we may impact if we follow God's command in Mark 6:15, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."

Thank you Scalpel At The Cross for allowing me to witness this miracle of grace! †





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# 2016 REVIEW

2016 proved to be a year of many unforeseen transitions and challenges for Scalpel At The Cross. But we are humbled and grateful to share that, in the midst of those, medical care and ministry work continued by God's grace.



In 2016, we welcomed 20 team members for two medical trips in February and September for an estimated value of donated team member time at \$48,800. Over the two medical trips, we evaluated 93 patients and provided \$326,500 worth of surgical care to 29 patients.

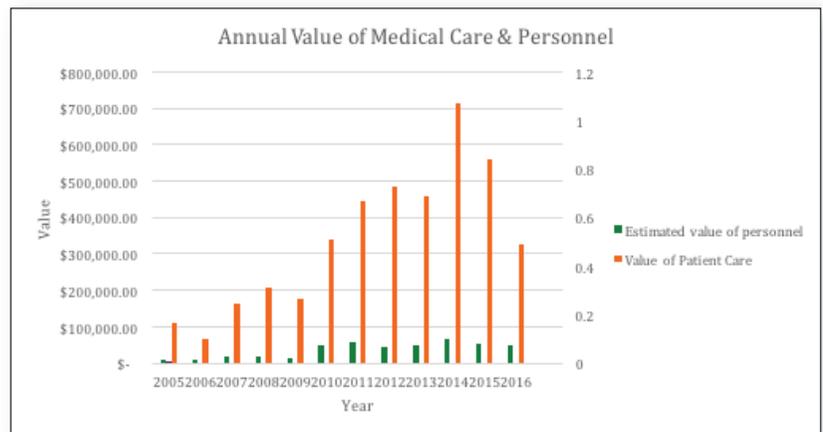
We also organized an administrative trip in July devoted to cleaning out and organizing clinic supplies and making key connections with ministry and medical partners in the Pucallpa community.

Thank you for the ongoing support of many family, friends, and organizations that enables us to fulfill our mission, "to be a lighthouse for Christ through a medical ministry in the Peruvian Amazon region of South America". ✝



## 2016 HIGHLIGHTS

20	TEAM MEMBERS	93	PATIENTS EVALUATED
\$48K+	ESTIMATED TIME DONATED	29	PATIENTS RECEIVED SURGICAL CARE
2	MEDICAL TRIPS	\$326.5K	IN SURGICAL CARE TO PATIENTS



*Support our mission*

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or contact us at:  
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