

Introduction and thanks

I would like to start by thanking the Lord and thanking my dear friends Pastor Miguel and Marie Carmen for allowing me the honour and the privilege of being here at this 25th anniversary of Remar.

I have been following Jesus since 1977 and I can count on one hand the numbers of highly significant occasions when God has met with me and changed my life forever. Being present in the early days of Remar was certainly one of them and I don't think that many days have gone by since 1984 when I have not thought about Pastor Miguel, Marie Carmen and the leaders that we have met. Some are here today while others like Leo, Ramon and Pepe have gone ahead and are with Jesus, waiting for us to catch them up. The sights that we have seen, the blessings we have received and the sufferings we have experienced in Remar, as well as the lessons we have learned have all been part of the Christ's discipleship of our lives.

We are supposed to be prophetic but when you get a bit older you have to stop yourself being more nostalgic than prophetic but let me remember a few things.

I can remember as if it was yesterday being driven to Bilbao airport in one of the first of the Remar vans. Instead of seats it had a sofa in the back upon which on this occasion sat three rather large ladies who were also being taken to Bilbao. Unfortunately the sofa was not fixed to the floor and the clutch pedal on the van was stiff and came up all at once and the van lurched forward and threw the sofa on its back. All you could see were six legs up in the air.

This same van then had a puncture but there was no spare tyre and we had a plane to catch. Pastor Miguel discovered that if he drove fast enough on three wheels, and provided there were no serious bends in the road, the van somehow kept going, which it did all the way to the motorway exit in Bilbao here it ground to halt in a shower of sparks and we got a taxi.

I am sure you never had the Bollycao cakes that were green on the inside and sometimes had animal life in the middle, but we did !

Our very first night in Remar was unforgettable. We stayed in the very first girl's home in Pangua where we slept on straw surrounded by a dozen beautiful girls off the street, the kind that pastors always warn you about ! I don't think I sleep for more than five minutes at a time. I was terrified. The next day over at the boys home changed my life and theology forever. You can read about that in Boga Mar Adentro.

I don't think I will ever forget a campaign in the beginning of the work in San Sebastian. We had been on the streets all day, not a lot had gone well or to time and there was one particular young man who had a few problems - and he was giving me a hard time. After midnight we went to a flat somewhere in the backs of San Sebastian and collapsed. We were exhausted. About four in the morning there was a great banging on the door. I went and opened it with the security chain in place. Of all people it was that young man. "What do you want," I said ? "Let me in," he replied. "No." "Let me in." "No." "Let me in !" I said, "Give me one reason why I should." "It's my house," he said. Others nodded and hid. It turned out that we were in his bed, and I tell you we got out, we got dressed, we got in the car and we fled over the border into France, drove all the way to England and said, "Never, ever again."

And then there was the very nice car in Valencia that the brothers lent us. It turned

out to be a car that someone had sent in for repairs while they were out of town. I don't think I have ever had a more panic-stricken telephone call than the one I got after the owner came back home a bit early.

And then there was the Peugeot that erupted like Mount Vesuvius in the very centre of Zaragoza. And the Seat that used more water than diesel and had to be abandoned in the middle of Teruel province. And then there was the house in the middle of nowhere which had ghosts or demons visibly passing through our bedroom. We had wondered why everyone else was sleeping down the road.

And, and . . I think I had better be quiet. We actually had some fun in those early days, we had things to tell our friends. And it's better these days, isn't it ? Don't answer that !

I actually owe a great debt to Pastor Daniel del Vecchio who we first met in Torremolinos in 1981. This godly man was going where no-one else wanted to go, he was ministering the power of God to young people that everyone else crossed the road to avoid. I saw something raw and real, something frightening and compelling all at the same time. I saw the price that Pastor Dan paid and I trembled. I listened to him and I heard words that changed my life forever . .

Live simply, so that others might simply live.
We love to be called servants, but hate treated to be like them.

I actually owe another great debt to Pastor Miguel and Marie Carmen for making me so welcome on a hundred and one occasions and allowing me to see God at work - saving, healing and restoring broken lives in ways that most people in my country only ever read about in books. I don't think anyone has influenced and corrected my Christian life more than these two wonderful followers of Christ and lovers of the poor.

Pastor Miguel actually blames me for getting him involved in Africa after he came with me to Burkina Faso in 1986. This was a trip which left me many kilos lighter and much thinner after a visit to what was called the restaurant of the only hotel up in the desert. Seeing the unwashed cook sleeping on the kitchen table should have been a warning, but I guess we were hungry. The same meal left Pastor Miguel unable to visit the bathroom for almost a week until a magnificent and sudden hour of relief came ! Our other friend went straight from the plane to the hospital where he fell into a coma so maybe I escaped lightly. After that experience a few weeks eating yoghurt that is a few weeks past the sell by date is nothing at all to worry about.

It's true and it's my fault but I count it an honour and a privilege to have been the means of introducing Remar to Africa. Here we are years later, and thousands and thousands of poor Africans have been led to Jesus and blessed through the work.

But you would never believe the crazy way it all began. Not even Pastor Miguel knows this dark secret.

Back in 1984 we gave a bed for the night to a young man from Burkina Faso who had been studying the Bible in the UK and was going home the next day. We had never met him before, his name was Etienne. I had never heard of his country and when he said the name of the capital – Ouagadougou – I had no idea what he was talking about. It turned out that he was the Minister for Sport and a believer and he gave his testimony in our church the next day.

Anyway, at four o'clock he had to catch a train to London and then a plane to Paris and another flight to Ouagadougou, wherever that was. I took him to the station and gave him some money to buy a ticket. I said, "be quick because we have only got five minutes before the train goes. I will take your case to the train." He ran off to buy the ticket and I took the handle of his case. I pulled, I pushed, I pulled again, I went red then purple, I did everything but I could not lift that case. I thought, "Why is it stuck ?" I was sweating rivers by now.

Etienne came running back with his ticket, took the case as if it were a feather, put it on his shoulder almost two metres up in the air and ran for the train. I was so embarrassed, so red-faced and so totally humiliated. I was the weak white man who ran after him like a puppy dog. He got on the train at the last second as it pulled out. He shouted, "Thank you, thank you, God bless you, see you again."

"See me again, no way," I said to myself. "I never, ever want to see you again."

About a month later a letter arrived from Burkina Faso, all muddy and ragged. It was from Etienne who was overflowing with thanks, praising God for ever meeting me and for all we talked about, but he had a problem. He wanted to leave the government to follow the call of Christ and be a pastor but the government said he knew too much and if he left they would kill him. He asked me to tell him whether to leave or to stay.

"Me!" I said. "Who am I to tell him ?" "If I say obey God and leave the government they will kill him and it will be my fault. If I say stay, then God might kill him for being disobedient." I didn't know very much in those days. So I wrote back and told him to pray and seek God and things like that, I wrote everything I could think of to avoid telling him what to do and so get the blame for his imminent death. There will be no more Africans in my house, I thought. What a mess !

Six weeks later another letter arrived. "Brother Les, my pastor, praise God, praise God and so on, thank you for your prayers" – he obviously had no idea how few prayers I had prayed. There had been a revolution, the president was dead and he was out of the government and had gone to a village called Nandiala to start a church there. Would I come as soon as possible.

Well, now that I was a "hero" I could think about going. So I did think about it, and I bought a ticket on Air Afrique - but not one person would go with me, not one. The white man's grave they all said, "malaria, lions, snakes and all those vaccinations." I wrote to Etienne and told him the date, the flight number and to expect me. A month or so later with 56 kilos of clothes to give away and plenty of creams and sprays to repel the mosquitoes, lions and snakes I went all by myself.

Back in 1984 there was a runway in the centre of Ouagadougou but no airport, just a big wooden hut full of big soldiers and big guns. All around the runway were native mud huts, people cooking over camp fires, goats, children and donkeys. A few people got off and the plane took off again right away leaving us there. I had never seen anything so primitive in my life and as I looked and waited it soon became clear that there was no-one to meet me. I was terrified. Night was falling, the smoke from a hundred camp fires was rising and I was standing there with eyes upon me.

What I did not know was that Etienne was 80 kilometres away and there was no post. My letter was still in a Post Office box in the capital. A voice inside my head was laughing and saying, "By tonight you will be either dead or in prison." I had no language, no address, no phone numbers and there were no phones anyway. I got my

bit of money out, just a few pounds and a man appeared from nowhere and snatched it. Darkness fell and the voice laughed louder and said the same things over and over again despite my feeble attempts to contradict it with my verses of guidance from God.

Unexpectedly the man came back and pushed some strange money in my hand which surprised me. Then I saw some ancient taxis in the distance so I dragged the case towards them and chose the smallest taxi driver, just in case. I got in and he said in French, "Where do you want to go to." He said it again and looked at me. I was speechless. Just then the back door opened and the most beautiful African girl got in. I had seen her on the plane. She said to me in English, "Can I come with you, I have been working in the USA. Where are you going?" You know when you are in trouble don't you ? I said, "Will you tell this man to take me a church, any church and he can drop you off anywhere you say." It was a nightmare.

So off we went, I tried to look like the brave and confident African explorer but I was dying inside. The girl got out and the man drove on and stopped outside a strange church. Non, non, non I said – keep going. After what seemed like hours but was probably only minutes he drive into a place where some white men were talking. I ran for them and said, "Who are you, are you Christians by any chance?" They looked at me as if I was mad, which I certainly was by then. It turned out that they were Americans, builders from an Assemblies of God church and they had come to put roofs on churches in poor villages.

I was in the headquarters of the Assemblies of God in Burkina, exactly where Etienne was based. The president of the Assemblies came out and could hardly believe my story but he sent a boy to ride 80 kilometres on a bicycle to fetch Etienne. He arrived the next day, he was astonished at seeing me there and just as embarrassed as I had been back at the rail station in England.

He took me to his village and the next ten days of living with the poor of the earth who were very rich and faith but also very hungry, very thirsty and very sick changed my life forever. The sights I saw left me without words and unable to sleep all the way back to the UK where I arrived just in time for Christmas. The madness of everyone spending fortunes in the shops only made everything a hundred times worse. I had met parents who had just buried their child because they didn't have less than one single Euro to buy the medicine to save him. To this day I have never recovered nor do I ever want to.

Isn't it amazing how God calls?
Isn't it amazing how God gets our attention?

Are you really sure that you are called to stay where you are?

A long time ago in the days of the Old Testament Israel had turned away from following the one true living God and instead was worshipping idols and everybody was doing more or less what they wanted. Because of this God allowed enemies to come over their border; they took everything all the time, oppressed everybody and made life very difficult for years.

The story of Gideon

In Judges 6, 1-16 the Bible tells us about a young man called Gideon who was threshing wheat not out in the open air as usual, but he had hidden himself inside a

wine press so that the enemy soldiers would not see him. You can imagine that as he worked in secret and lived in fear year after year, he must have said to himself a thousand times over, "There must be more to life than this" but until that day there was not, at least not for him or his people.

The Bible says that suddenly, the Lord appeared to him in visible form and said,

"The LORD is with you, mighty warrior. "But sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of our enemies."

The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of the enemy's hand. Am I not sending you?"

"But Lord, " Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the enemies together."

The story goes on and that is exactly what happened. The Bible says that after this encounter with the angel of God three things happened in Gideon's life:

Gideon heard the voice of God,
Gideon obeyed the word of God and
Gideon moved in the Spirit of God

In time he brought a nation back to faith, although he was never a perfect leader.

The Lord said, "Go in the strength you have"

I want you to hear that phrase, "Go in the strength you have" and remember it forever. Like Gideon you too might be from a powerless and poor background and have been told for years that you are weak and a nobody.

So, here is some very good news for everyone who feels unqualified, for everyone who is not tall, dark, healthy, wealthy and handsome, for everyone who is not University educated, for everyone who is not influential or has the looks of a supermodel.

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 1, 26-30 that God chooses people who do not have much strength.

Why did God ever choose me to know Him to be loved by Him and to serve him? I really have no idea, I would never ever have chosen myself or anyone like me. I was never looking for Jesus, I was never interested in church or mission, I drank a lot of alcohol, took a lot of tranquillisers and made life a misery for everyone close to me, including and especially the one Christian man who prayed for me year after year and eventually put a New Testament into my hands when I was sick. Because of the love of this one man, when my life finally collapsed and there was no hope left, I knew that I could turn to the Jesus that he was following. I did turn to Jesus only to find that Jesus was waiting for me, to save me, to forgive me, to heal me and to choose me to follow him for a lifetime.

Secondly the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 12. 7-10 that God uses people who have

little strength.

There was a time when the apostle Paul was suffering from an illness which left him with no strength. Paul says that three times he cried out to the Lord to take it away from him and every time the Lord said No. "Take it away. No. Take it away! No." Paul must have said to the Lord, "Why not?"

The Lord explained to him, "My grace is sufficient, and my power is best seen through your weakness." From that day on Paul was never afraid of what made him weak, in fact he made a list of where he was not in control, and he embraced these times with joy because he realised that every weakness was an opportunity for God to pour His strength through Paul's life. Then things got done !

(2 Corinthians 12, 7-10)

And thirdly the Bible says that in time God changes our weakness for His strength.

He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
but those who wait before the LORD
will renew their strength.

That's Isaiah 40, 28-31

So what does God's strength look like ?

Paul said to his young friend Timothy, he said, "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim.2.1) That's what God's strength looks like – it looks like the grace of God, the kind that is always sufficient. We all need to learn to live in our grace zone, in fact the man who wrote the Psalms said inside the boundary lines life is a pleasant place. (Psalm 16)

So go in the strength you have, go in the grace that is yours in Jesus.

The only question left is where shall you go ? Jesus put the answer this way:

"Go and make disciples in all nations."

Go a short way, go a bit further, go to the very ends of the earth if that is what the Lord is saying to you. Go in your prayers, go in your giving, go in your obedience. Like Abraham who was God's first missionary many thousands of years ago had to do, make up your mind separately from everyone else, get hold of the strength that God is giving you, waste no more of life, go! Go and stand in the face of poverty, sickness, injustice and every other invasion of hell upon the earth. Go and pray down the Kingdom of God, a little of heaven upon earth.

Curiously, when Jesus said, "Go and make disciples in all nations" he was speaking to his eleven disciples. That sounds wrong doesn't it ? It should be twelve. It always was a close group of twelve but one had just lost his way and brought about the crucifixion of Jesus, before he took his own life in remorse. So when Jesus said go He was speaking to men whose hopes had been dashed, whose lives had been devastated and who were struggling to make sense of what was happening to them now. Jesus does not wait until your life is perfect and you understand everything before he invites you

to follow Him to the lost and to the poor of the world.

Curiously, Jesus told them to go to Galilee where he would meet them. Galilee, why Galilee? There were better places, more relaxing places but he said Galilee. I wonder why? I will tell you what I think.

It was in Galilee that they first met. It was in Galilee that these men first fell head over heels in love with Jesus and were lost in wonder at the beauty of this man. It was in Galilee that they first became friends and it was in Galilee that they would have done anything for him. Isn't it curious that Jesus now took them back to that place where He first loved them and they first loved him. And wouldn't it be curious if Jesus took you back in your thoughts and memories to those early days when He first came into your life, to those days when nothing was too much trouble for you to serve Him. And he commissioned you all over again for the next part of life.

Curiously, Jesus met with them on a mountain. Throughout the Bible you'll find that God often comes to speak with his people on a mountain side or a mountain top, In fact a lot of people often described conferences like this as a mountaintop experience so let's not be surprised if we hear the voice of God speaking in our hearts. If you are on a mountain it is obvious but the only way forward is down. Down into humble dependence on Christ and on His word and on His Spirit and down into the valleys of shadow and human suffering where multitudes wait like sheep without a Shepherd not knowing what to think or which way to go. Waiting for someone to come.

Perhaps not so curiously, the Bible says that when they saw him, they worshipped him..

When you see Jesus at his work – forgiving, healing, providing, loving – what else would you ever do except to bow your heart and worship Him as Lord and God.

Now we are arriving at what this hour is all about, now we're getting to the heart of the matter, now we're getting to what the call of God is all about.

It is not about church, it is not all about mission, social action, or bringing justice although the end result may be all of these things. The Great Commission - co-mission, Jesus and you, Jesus and us, is all above all about – worship.

Yes, worship is singing love songs to God, of course it is, but worship is not just for Sundays. It is the giving of my life not just my song and a few Euros.

Obeying the call by giving a cup of cold water in Jesus name to a poor thirsty African child is better worship than anything I can ever come up on a Sunday morning with all the music playing.

I can take you to the refugee camps in Uganda and we can feed and clothe the poor together.

I can take you to Africa's biggest slum in Nairobi, Kenya and we can build schools together.

I can take you to leper colonies in India and we can embrace the untouchables and feed them together.

I can take you to deeply Islamic Indonesia and we can preach the gospel to crowds of

young people and start churches together.

I can take you to the poverty of Peru and we can organise a party for the poor together and if it pleases God to do it again we can see the food multiply.

I can take you to orphans all over Africa and India and we can make a difference together.

I can take you to the streets of my city of Nottingham and we can feed the homeless, the mentally ill and the addicted, together.

Pastor Miguel can take you to even worse places where even angels fear to tread. You will see sights which would make even a heartless stone statue shed tears, sights that will accompany your every waking moment and every sleeping moment for a lifetime, sights that will wait for you in the morning, put you to bed at night and live in your dreams. For the people you meet out there you would do anything, but that is not the point.

The point is that we do it for Jesus first and for man second. We do it at His word if that is what he asks us to, as His hands and feet and heart. Such service, such privilege, such honour is first and foremost our act of worship, our bowing before Him to kiss his feet, our response to His invitation to go with Him to the lost and the last and the poor of the earth, in every generation. The heart of all mission is worship.

Matt Redman, one of the best young worship leaders of this generation wrote this,

When the music fades and all is stripped away
And I simply come
Longing just to bring something that's of worth
That will bless Your heart

I'll bring You more than a song
For a song in itself
Is not what You have required
You search much deeper within
Through the way things appear
You're looking into my heart

I'm coming back to the heart of worship
And it's all about You
All about You, Jesus
I'm sorry, Lord, for the things I've made it
When it's all about You
All about You, Jesus

Matthew says that some of the eleven doubted about taking that ultimate step of worshipping Jesus - and I am not surprised. Worship is not essentially a feel good experience on a Sunday morning. True worship is very costly, precious and rare. It is not all about me and how I feel and what is in it for me. It all about Jesus.

Jesus didn't put all his plans on hold until his friends came to a perfect faith and neither should we. Let people belong to the movement, they will soon come to believe what we believe and then they will do what we do. Too many churches insist that

people believe everything perfectly first, and behave impeccably - before they allow them to belong. What a recipe for empty buildings.

Jesus didn't put the brakes on, he said:

"God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."

Are you sure that you are called to stay where you are ?

It may be that you are – but you are called to pray for those who will go. It may be that you are – but you are called to send those who will go, and there is nothing second class at all about working to provide money and resources for those on the front line. I have never been able to go and stay for long but by the grace of God we have helped to send a lot of people into following the call of Christ.

Are you sure that you are called to stay where you are ?

What would stop you from going ?

Let me tell you very quickly what or rather who will stop you from going ?

1. The Holy Spirit will stop you from going – because He loves you and wants you have a positive experience that lasts a lifetime. God's promise is that if you are off the path to the right or the left, you will hear His voice and then you have the chance to live in the Spirit and be corrected if you wish to be. Or learn the hard way later on if you choose to insist on going your own way. Believe me when I say that hearing his voice has literally saved our lives, or our time or our finances of many occasions when we were going wrong even with the best of intentions.
2. Evil spirit will stop you from going – because he knows the devastating impact to the kingdom of darkness of a life fully surrendered to Jesus Christ, so he provokes pre-emptive attacks on your plans to stop you moving forward. Expect him to try and work through those nearest and dearest to you and for him to pull every emotional string that he can. The Bible says that at times like this if we will resist the devil and keep on pushing forward in the name of Jesus, it is the devil who will flee from us.
3. Your human spirit will stop you from going more often than any other activity from the Holy Spirit or from evil spirits. Men's hearts fail them through fear of the foreign and unknown. The hearts of women fail them as well and so does my own heart. To all of us the Bible says yet again, "Go in the strength you have and be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." A brave man is not a man without fear, a brave man or woman is one who carries on despite his fears and overcomes them by doing so.

So where will you go ?

Let me finish by making everything very simple for you, it could not be easier and if you will follow this one step it could be that on this mountain, today will be the day

when your life changes forever and people all over the world will thank God for you.

Matthew tells us in chapter 10 of his book that one day Jesus called his twelve disciples. Luke adds the detail that they were sat on a mountain.

Where did he call them to go to? He did not call them to go to a country, or to a people, or to a tribe, or to a church, or to a denomination or to a mission.

He called them to come and to be with Him.

That's the primary, fundamental call of God. That's the invitation, that's the only safe direction where you find all the answers in due time.

We are called to be with Jesus - because it is all about Him. We are called to spend time with him, to surrender our days and night to him, to eat and drink in his presence, to talk with him and about him and above all to listen to him and to learn from him.

Look - when Jesus calls you He call you by name, which means he knows all about them, all about your past and your failures and he still calls.

It was Jesus who trains, authorizes and equips you, and when the time comes, it is Jesus who sends you out with clear instructions, saying: "Go here, don't go there, say this, do that, live like this, here's how, this will happen."

If you belong to Remar then you are blessed because you are in a fellowship that will care for you while behind the scenes the Holy Spirit heals, teaches and equips you. He has a 1001 ways of getting you into the place where he can work through you for the glory of God and for the blessing of the lost and the poor. of the world

So – will you decide to go in the strength you have.

For every Gideon here today, feeling that he or she is weak, broken, pretty useless and undeserving, the word of God comes to you: Go in the strength you have.

For everyone who went years ago and is tired out, will you still go and keep going in the strength God gives ?

For everyone who spends their days hidden behind the walls that they have erected in their mind to keep the enemy out, thinking all the time that there must be more to life, more to faith, more to following Jesus than this, here is a prayer which is actually another worship song, this time by Tim Hughes, a young worship leader in the UK.

The song is called, "There must be more than this." I hope the music will play quietly in the background while I read you the words:

There must be more than this . .
O breath of God come breathe within.
There must be more than this,
Spirit of God we wait for you,
Fill us anew we pray,
Fill us anew we pray.

Come like a rushing wind,

Fill us with power from on high,
Now set the captives free,
leave us abandoned to your praise.
Lord let your glory fall,
Lord let your glory fall.

Consuming Fire,
Fan into flame
a passion for your name.
Spirit of God,
fall in this place,
Lord have your way,
Lord have your way,
with us.

Glory, glory, send your glory . . .
Glory, glory, send your glory . . .

Let me finish with these words from Acts 13.1:

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Notice that Barnabas and Saul knew already deep down inside that they had been called, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." They might have known the whisperings of the call of God for weeks, months, years or even half a lifetime, all the while that still, small voice was never far away, helping to shape every decision, provoking a thousand and one sighs of "there must be more than this."

That day as they were worshipping suddenly without any warning the Holy Spirit confirmed the call and said, "Come with me, let's go together . . ."

I wonder what you have been hearing in your heart and if today might be your day.

Father, in the name of Jesus, your Son,
send your Holy Spirit
to send your people.

Now wait and begin to surrender as you feel the Spirit of God touching your life.